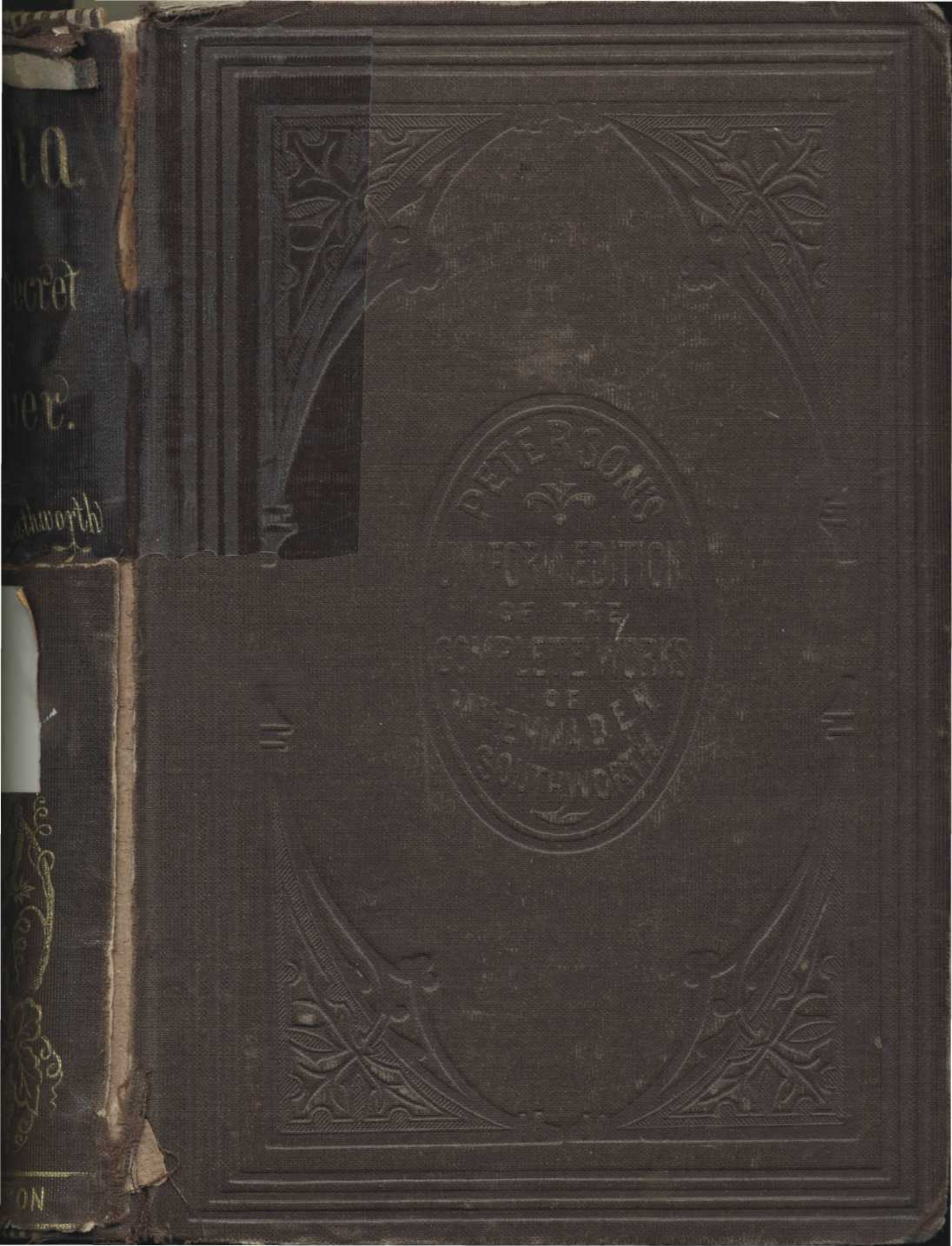
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VIVIA;

OR, THE

SECRET OF POWER.

BY

MRS. EMMA D. E. N. SOUTHWORTH.

AUTHOR OF "LOST HEIRESS," "DESERTED WIFE," "MISSING BRIDE," "INDIA," "WIFE'S VICTORY," "RETRIBUTION," "DISCARDED DAUGHTER," "CURSE OF CLIFTON," ETC., ETC.

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Thine is a high and holy work of love,
And thou an angel's happiness shalt know;
Shalt bless the earth while in the world above;
The good begun by thee shall onward go
In many a branching stream, and wider flow.—*Charles Wilcox.*

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VIVIA:

OR,

THE SECRET OF POWER.

CHAPTER I.

LIFE.

We are borne into life—it is sweet—it is strange—
We lie still on the knee of a mild mystery
That smiles with a change!—*E. B. Browning.*

God breathed into her the breath of life, and she became a living soul. A breath of divine life incarnated, a new soul sent upon this planet to live, to struggle, perhaps to sin, and oh! how surely to suffer. The advent of another immortal. The miracle of each moment's recurrence, yet an eternal mystery still. The setting in motion of another free power that shall move forever. The beginning of a life that may have no end. It is but this instant called into existence—an existence as yet unconscious, for it is without either thoughts or affections, yet an existence which, when countless millions of ages shall have rolled away, and suns, with all their systems, shall have sunk into nothingness—must ever go on and on eternally.

How will this living soul live? Will she be wasted by worldliness, smothered in sensuality, or maddened by ma-

lignant passions? In other words, shall the "world," the "flesh," or the "devil" win her?

Or triumphing over the fatal three, will she preserve her Divine life, and become the inspirer of new life into other souls dead in trespasses and sin? We shall see.

God breathed into her the breath of life, and she became a living soul! That is the first and greatest fact of every new existence. That is the common bond of human brotherhood. In that are the prince and the peasant peers.

In every life upon this earth there is a birth, a death, and a resurrection, of which neither the parish register, nor the family record ever speaks, for they are "of the spirit, spiritual." In every life upon this earth there is effort, failure, and success; aspiration, despondency, and victory; hope, despair, and triumph—in other words, life, death, and resurrection!

One life of which I write, began in light, went down into the darkness of death; yes! and was hidden a "night of years" in the grave, ere the angel of the resurrection rolled the stone away and called her forth. Despair not, Christian pilgrim, though the sky be utterly overcast, and thou canst see "no light in earth or heaven," no sweet hope, no fair possibility of life. Despair not—thou art only passing through the valley of shadows, and by the very blackness of the shadow on thy forward path judge the brightness of the light beyond that casts it. Thou must pass through the shadow to arrive at the light. Be good, be wise, be strong; keep truth, though hope herself should fail, and thou shalt ascend into life and light. So it was with our Saviour; so it is with the lowliest disciple that takes up the cross to follow Him; so it was with her of whom I write; so it has been or may be with thee—"for one event happeneth to all."

"Genevieve. Call her Genevieve." The language was English, though spoken in a foreign land and among for-

eign attendants. "Let your heroine saint be my infant's guardian spirit also. Call her Genevieve." These were the last words uttered by the young mother, as resigning her child into the hands of her nurse, she sank back upon her pillow. "Genevieve." The name so softly breathed forth from the pallid lips of the fainting mother seemed hailed with acclamation by the world.

The signal gun from the castle tower gave forth its tremendous voice, and was answered by thunders of artillery from the fortress that frowned above the river. The Fleur-de-lis ran up and streamed from every public building in the town, and every mainmast among the shipping in the harbor. And a million of voices sent to heaven the joyous shout—"Vive la princesse!"

For in the same hour that this child was born in the hospital, a princess was born in the palace. The high and mighty princes and prelates of the kingdom received the one—a meek and lowly servant of the poor, an humble Sister of Charity, embraced the other. All the "pride, pomp, and circumstance" of a royal welcome hailed the one—a simple "Jesus preserve her" blessed the other. For the one was exacted the homage of the world, for the other was asked only its sufferance.

Yet the name of the one has been written in letters of blood upon the blackest page of history, and the name of the other traced in characters of light upon the book of life!

CHAPTER II.

THE MOUNTAIN PATH.

The wildest waste but this can show
Some touch of nature's genial glow;
But here, above, around, below,
On mountain or in glen,
Nor tree, nor shrub, nor plant, nor flower,
Nor aught of vegetative power,
The weary eye may ken.—*Scott.*

A WINTER night, a mountain-pass, a snow-storm, and a wandering child—that is the picture I wish you to look upon—a picture evoked by imagination from the deep of memory, and viewed through the clear obscure of many years.

It was a winter whose fierce severity of cold has become proverbial.

The time was the night of the third of January, eighteen hundred and—. The calendar would inform you that it was the eve of St. Genevieve.

The scene was one of those mountain gorges in the wildest part of Western Maryland.

The path, never safe even in daylight and in the best weather, was now exceedingly perilous. The ground was covered with snow that froze as it fell. The sky was "blind with a double dark" of night and of clouds.

With toiling steps and weary feet the child reached the highest point of the pass. The snow had nearly ceased to fall, the wind had lulled, or arose only in fitful gusts.

She paused to take breath and look around her—for though to one coming out of the light into such a scene, nothing might be visible but the blackness of darkness, yet

to the accustomed vision of the night-wandering child, certain landmarks were dimly apparent, looming like blacker shadows, denser clouds amid the general gloom.

Her piercing eyes could see the heavy vapor-laden range of mountains that marked the opposite horizon, and even distinguish their spectral peaks from the murky mists that hung around them.

Then she looked down below her feet. Between the ridge upon which she stood and that opposite ridge against the horizon, a sea of impenetrable shadows seemed to roll. She knew it was a wilderness of forests, rocks, and streams —at this time a pathless desert, a horrible gehenna, without sign of human habitation, with no sight but the black, blacker, and blackest shadows of the night, clouds and storm, and no sound but the roaring of the wind among the ravines around, and the howling of some hunger-maddened animal prowling through the forest below.

But never had man or woman a stouter heart than beat bravely in the bosom of that child. Her fearlessness, like her safety, seemed almost supernatural; yet the one was the effect of the other, and both were the result of her organization and her training.

The descent was much more difficult and dangerous than any part of the journey had been, yet the child did not falter. Her voice was elastic and firm as her foot was sure and springing, as she said,

"I can see no light yet; but courage, my Fido; this is the north ridge; we must be near Mount Storm; go on, my Fido."

The great tawny bull-dog that crouched at her feet arose slowly, stretched his heavy limbs, and pulling one ponderous foot before the other, marched gravely with a measured tread down the mountain-path.

Carefully she followed him.

The downward path seemed but a formless precipice of

clouds and vapors, pitching headlong into an abyss of unknown horrors; yet trusting in the sure instinct and firm footing of her guide, she kept closely behind him.

And Fido led her safely down dizzy steeps, and along the brink of slippery ledges, where a single false step must have precipitated her down to a dreadful death.

An hour of careful and toilsome descent brought her to the foot of the mountain.

And then on the right hand, some quarter of a mile up the valley, and immediately under the shelter of the same ridge she had just passed, shone a light as from some large building.

"Joy, Fido! there is our resting place!" said the child.

But here a new trouble beset her. It was not so cold as on the mountain-top—the snow was not frozen, but the wind that had lulled for a time now rose in violence, lifting the snow and tossing it in great drifts; now hurling it in masses against her slight form with a force that nearly prostrated her; now raising it in clouds aloft, and showering it into her face and neck and eyes, piercing, stinging, blinding, like the points of millions of needles; and now rolling it up in great impassable ridges across her path. And over all was hung a pall of darkness so profound, that but for the guidance of that faithful dog, the frightful path could never have been traversed, nor that distant light reached.

But Fido literally plowed with his own body a furrow through the snow-drifts for the child to walk in.

Their way now lay among the sparse and stunted evergreens that grew along the base of the ridge, and formed the outskirts of the valley forest.

Occasionally around the projections of the ridge or behind a clump of intervening trees, the light would disappear, but by keeping along in the same direction, and close to the base of the mountain, she could not lose sight of it entirely.

And hark! that was the sound of a clock striking. It

came from the direction of the building toward which she was toiling, and to which she was now very near.

The trees grew still more sparsely. And now and then she caught glimpses of a collection of buildings, from the central one of which streamed many lights. At last she left the last trees behind her and emerged into an open space, and saw before her a high brick wall, sweeping around and enclosing an extensive group of buildings. There was an iron gate in the wall before her, flanked with a small Gothic chapel on the right, and a stone lodge on the left. But both were quite dark.

"The lodge is closed; the porter is asleep, or else has gone away We will try the gate, Fido!"

CHAPTER III.

THE CONVENT.

From the gay world in early youth they fled,
And then to mountains, wilds, and deserts led,
They raised these cloister walls; the desert smiled,
And Paradise was opened in the wild.—*Pope.*

WHILE the tempest raged without, all was quiet in the convent walls.

In the central building that formed the cloister proper, each nun and white-vailed novice had retired to her separate cell.

In the young ladies' academy that occupied the right wing, the fair pupils, under the guardianship of the austere Mother Martha, were reposing in their dormitory.

In the female orphans' home that filled the left wing, the children in charge of the gentle Sister Angela, were sleeping on their little beds.

In the infirmary, on the third floor of the central building, Sister Petronella, in her black robes and list slippers, glided about among the little cots, looking too much like a messenger of death, but being really the herald of life to many a sick and suffering child.

On the first floor of the same building—in what might well be called the heart of the institution—namely, the private apartment of the Mother Superior, there were more life and light and warmth.

It was a large, pleasant front room, on the left hand side of the entrance hall. Its three tall front windows, when open in daylight, commanded a fine view down this valley, at the eastern extremity of which the convent was situated But now the windows were closed in with shutters and hidden with blinds. The floor was thickly carpeted, and the walls ornamented with sacred pictures. The room was heated by a blazing hickory fire, and lighted by a chandelier of bronze, that hung from the centre of the ceiling.

Just under the light of this chandelier, stood a large round centre-table, covered with a green cloth; around it sat half a dozen nuns occupied with fancy needle-work; and before each one stood a little basket filled with scraps of silk, satin, velvet, lace, ribbon, bugles, beads, spangles, etc. —being materials for the manufacture of those elegant pin cushions, needle books, reticules, and other rather costly trifles that filled the glass-cases of their show room, to be sold for the benefit of the orphan asylum.

They were busy and happy over their work, comparing and combining materials, laughing, talking, and jesting, as any other set of girls or women might do. And the sincere laughter of the younger, was not unfrequently provoked by the quaint joke or repartee from the elders.

Apart from the group around the table, and near the left-hand corner of the fire-place, sat an aged nun employed in making a flannel garment for a sick girl.

And opposite the old nun, on the right of the fire-place, sat the Abbess. She was the reader for the evening to the little company, and she had just finished reading the wild and wondrous legend of St. Genevieve, whose festival was kept annually upon this day. And now her voice had ceased; the book lay upon her lap with her thumb still between the leaves, where she had left off; and unmindful of the merry talk and laughter that was springing up among the young nuns around the table—she paused—perhaps in abstract thought—perhaps in listening to the beating of the storm without.

"Every face is a history or a prophecy"—*hers* was both. You could not have looked upon that woman as she sat there, without painfully wondering what wayward destiny had brought her thither. She was apparently about twenty-eight years of age—of a tall, finely proportioned and commanding form, around which fell her black drapery with the classic elegance of some Greek statue, and whose every attitude when in repose, and every gesture when in motion, was full of inexpressible dignity and grace.

She wore the severe habit of her order—the ample black gown with the flowing sleeves, girdled around the waist; the white linen barbette, fitting close as a frame around the face and under the chin, and brought down and pinned square over the bosom; the broad black band across the upper part of the forehead; and the long black vail laid over all, and hanging down upon the shoulders—thus concealing every tress of hair, and every inch of throat, and every glimpse of personal beauty, except the closely cut off face and hands; and for sole ornament, the silver cross upon the breast, and the black rosary hanging from the girdle.

But that face! you could not have looked upon it once, and ever after in all the vicissitudes of life have lost its haunting memory—that face, with the pure oval outline and the pale olive complexion—with the deep mournfulness that

vailed the dark impassioned eyes, and the mute eloquence that closed the full curved lips, whose lightest tone when open thrilled you with its rich, deep melody—for her voice was the luscious double contralto of a bosom vibrating with its own fullness of life, music, and emotion.

How came she there? A creature endowed with such a glorious wealth of beauty, intellect, and feeling? A being formed to inspire and respond to the purest, highest, and most fervent affection? A woman created to bless home and adorn society? How had she missed her destiny; how had she fallen into this death—in life? For her life seemed hidden in the grave. She appeared only in the offices of her religion, and she lived only wlth the old saints, martyrs and heroes of the past. Ah! beautiful and gifted, why was she lost to the world?

None of the nuns, her companions, suggested by their appearance such questions—for they were all more or less rather below mediocrity. Three were old women, sickly, faded, feeble and dull. You felt that now at least the quiet monotony of a life free from gnawing care or wearing toil, was the happiest lot for them. The remaining two were young, but untroubled by any serious amount of thought or feeling. In looking upon them, you perceived that they had made no very great sacrifice of heart or brain in retiring from the world, that happily also had suffered no very severe bereavement in being left by them.

One of the two—the pretty little French girl, Sister Margarite, was a natural milliner, and the bonnet business in losing her, probably lost an invaluable votary—that is all. Her whole soul was now absorbed in the construction of a blue velvet reticule—full large enough to hold it.

The other, Sister Lucy, was an incorrigible giglet, whom you might be sure would be merry if not wise in any place.

The dark-eyed Abbess spoke at last.

"Sisters, I thought I heard the outer gate open—was it so?"

"Yes, dear mother, and I think it was the wind blew it open. St. Mary, it is an awful night!" said Lucy.

"I notice that when the wind blows harder than usual, Brother Peter always leaves that gate unfastened. I wonder if he does it to keep us awake all night with its banging and clapping, for I do believe he does it on purpose," said Margarite.

"He does it on purpose, though not to keep you awake, Margarite. Brother Peter has my order to leave the gate unfastened these stormy nights, for the sake of any poor travelers who might need shelter. Brother Peter sleeps soundly, and they could never make him hear by knocking at the gate—neither would they make us hear at this house, for we are too far off. So the gate is left unfastened that any benighted wanderer, passing this way, may enter and find shelter."

"St. Peter! I hope no traveler is abroad to-night! But now I think of it, I should not wonder if there *was*—for I do believe that gate was opened by Sister Angela, who has gone out to nurse or comfort some sick body or sinful soul. No season, hour, or weather, ever stops *her*. I do wish, mother, you would forbid her to go out at night or in bad weather—for she will certainly catch her death of cold," said Lucy.

"I doubt if any cold we have, can chill a body warmed by such a fervent soul as Angela's. Besides, I have no right to hinder her."

"Hark! that was the door-bell that rung!" exclaimed Lucy.

"Who can it be at this time of night?" questioned Margarite.

"Oh! it is some poor, dying sinner, that needs the prayers of the church for a parting soul."

"Some storm-driven traveler, rather, who is tired and wet and hungry, and needs rest, supper, fire, and a night's lodging."

"The portress must have left her office some hours since. Go, Sister Josepha, and see who is there," said the Abbess.

The nun addressed left the room, followed by the eyes of that little company; for few were the events which varied the monotony of the lonely isolated convent life, so that even the ringing of the door-bell, late on a stormy winter's night, had in it something of weird interest.

They listened eagerly. First came the slight noise of opening the door, followed by the rush of wind, then the difficulty of closing it, after which a short conversation and approaching footsteps, cut short and outstripped by a rushing, impetuous sound that heralded the noisy entrance of a huge bull-dog, who burst into the parlor and stood shaking himself until he raised a little snow-storm around him. His formidable size, heavy limbs, and thick covering of snow, made him resemble some great white polar bear; while his short, thick head, strong jaws and sharp fangs, looked so savage and ferocious, that the frightened nuns, with a simultaneous scream, sprang from every direction, and huddled around their Abbess; but only for a moment, for the dog was instantly followed by the child, who went directly up and laid her hand upon his head and stilled him, and also by Sister Josepha, who approached the Abbess, and said,

"It is a little girl, madame, who was on her way to Mount Storm."

"Why, it is little Red Riding Hood! It is little Red Riding Hood herself!" laughed Sister Lucy.

"It is little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf!" echoed Margarite.

And "Little Red Riding Hood! Little Red Riding Hood!" exclaimed all the sisters, flocking around.

"A little Una and her Lion, rather," said the Abbess, smiling sweetly on the child.

She was indeed a bright creature, as she stood there in the light of the glowing fire; her fine little form clad in a short cloak of scarlet cloth, embossed with frozen snow and icicles that shimmered and sparkled like some costly embroidery of Oriental pearls and diamonds. The round hood of the cloak had fallen partly back, displaying a face bright with the beauty of childhood, health, and joy; lighted up by a pair of brilliant hazel eyes; flushed with a carnation bloom on cheek and lip, and shaded by crispy, curling, bright, brown ringlets, sparkling with gems of frost that a fairy princess might have envied.

"Oh, see!" said the child, when she found herself the centre of observation, "how the icicles are melting from my cloak! And Fido, too! see how he has scattered the snow all over the carpet! Let us go out into the hall!"

"By no means, my dear child," said the Abbess, looking tenderly at her, "come nearer the fire. Lucy, take off her wet cloak and shoes. Margarite, bring a suit of dry clothes from the children's wardrobe. Sister Josepha, go and bring some bread and wine, and spice, from the refectory, to make her a warm beverage. Sit down, my child, and let Sister Lucy remove your wet shoes."

"But Mount Storm—I thought this was Mount Storm when I came into the gate. And, oh! I am very anxious to get to it to-night. Is it far off? Can I get there?" asked the child, earnestly.

"No, my dear, you cannot possibly reach there to-night. You left Mount Storm a mile down the valley to the left, when you took the right-hand road that led you here."

"How could I have taken the right road instead of the left! But oh! I must—I must go to Mount Storm," said the child, rising with every sign of great anxiety.

"Be content; sit down; you cannot get there to-night.

You could not possibly have done so, even had you taken the other road, although you might have lost your life in the attempt, poor child. Did you ever hear of Mad River? It is a raging cataract that dashes down the rocks on the left side of the mansion-house, and rushes with great velocity around the base of the mountain encircling the front of Mount Storm, forming a complete moat, cutting the place off from the rest of the valley. The river is fordable in good weather, but in a storm like this it is quite impassable. The stream is so rapid also, that it seldom freezes except along its edges; and covered over as it is now with its treacherous vail of snow, you might have gone upon it unawares, and perished. Thank Providence, my child, that you were led away from the left road and into the right. For the rest, be content to stay with us to-night, and early to-morrow as the stream can be passed, we will send you to Mount Storm."

The little girl resumed her seat, and blithely gave herself up to the hands of Margarite and Lucy, who had returned with warm clothes, in which they were now dressing her, while Sister Josepha warmed some weak wine and water, and poured it over a piece of toast in a glass, and using a chair for a stand, sat upon it some bread and cheese and a saucer of marmalade.

All this time the sisters were feeling the utmost surprise and curiosity, and would gladly have overwhelmed the child with questions as to who she was, where she came from, and above all things, why she was abroad on such a bitter night—while as yet the Abbess had not even asked her name or troubled her with the least question. She had only calmed her anxiety and ministered to her wants. But now, when she was warmed and fed, and sat in an easy chair, with her feet toward the fire, the Abbess inquired gently,

"What is your name, my little girl?"

"Vivia!"

"Vivia?"

"Yes—I know it is an odd name, but I will tell you how I got it. My first name of Genevieve was too long for every day, so some that loved me called me 'Genny,' though others called me Vivia, which they thought was the prettiest half of the name and suited me better. Poor Fido! what a sin to forget you!" said the child, breaking suddenly off from her discourse, and looking pitifully upon her dog, who had stretched his great length along the rug, and now, with his head extended flat upon his fore-paws, and his great honest eyes fixed upon his little mistress, lay contemplating her comfortable circumstances with the utmost satisfaction. "Poor, good Fido, how patient and generous you are. May I give him this bread and cheese, madame? He will take it from my hand and not drop a crumb on the floor."

"Bread and cheese is not exactly the food for the dog, my dear; he shall be fed and housed, though. Margarite, will you attend to it?"

The young nun took the plate of fragments, and using it as a decoy, called the dog, but not until Genevieve had said,

"Go, Fido," did he get up and follow her out. The child looked kindly after him. "He is such a good dog—you don't know what a good dog he is. He brought me so safely through the dreadful storm."

"And where did you come from to-day?"

"From the little village of Eyrie."

"You don't live there?"

"Oh no, I only got there to-day. I have lived most of my life—that is, the first part of my life, at the Convent of Notre Dame des Belles-Œuvres."

"Belles-Œuvres!"

The word sprang spasmodically from the white lips of the Abbess, from whose suddenly sharpened features every ves-

tige of color had fled, as she quickly crossed the room, took the hand of the astonished child, and gazed into her face—her bosom was oppressed to suffocation, her voice choked, her vision obscured, her very reason reeling—but she felt the eyes of all her nuns upon her, and with a superhuman effort, recollecting herself, she calmly said:—

"It is past our usual hour for retiring, sisters. Disperse to your cells. This child—I will myself take charge of her to-night. Go, sisters—remember me and—our little guest in your prayers to-night. *Benedicite.* Come, Genevieve, I will show you your sleeping place."

And taking the hand of the child, she led her from the room through the door that opened into the hall. At the extremity of this hall was a staircase leading to a landing, from which diverged two corridors—one to the right, the other to the left—but both alike in construction, having on one side a long row of windows looking out upon the hills, and on the other side a long row of doors opening into the cells.

The Abbess conducted her charge up the right hand corridor, at the farther extremity of which was a comfortable chamber, with a fire in the fire-place, a carpet on the floor, a white curtained bedstead in the corner beside a large window, whose white drapery, divided in the centre, fell gracefully around a little altar and crucifix that stood before it. A picture of the Virgin and Child hung over the mantelpiece. And two low chairs stood near the fire.

"Sit down in this chair, Genevieve, you must be very tired, poor child, and I will not keep you up—but here are some night-clothes, and—while you put them on—answer me the questions I shall ask you. You told me your Christian name—what was your family name?"

"Laglorieuse, madame."

"Laglorieuse!"

Again the Abbess had nearly lost her self-possession.

"And that place you named?"

"Belles-Œuvres, lady."

"How came you here, then? And who sent you here to me this night—this night of all nights!"

"Dear lady, I was not sent to you; I was sent to Mount Storm, but did not reach it, you know."

"True—true—how the wind raves! it was madness to send a child out in such a tempest."

"There was no sign of a tempest when I came from Eyrie to-day."

"Little girl, tell me something about yourself; where have you lived besides at Belles-Œuvres?"

"Belles-Œuvres was the first place that I ever remember. I was very happy there. The nuns loved me dearly, and taught me well. I lived there till I was seven years old. Then Abbe Francois—"

"Abbe Francois?"

"Yes, madame! he was the cure of the village church, and the Confessor of the Convent at Belles-Œuvres—he was ordered to Ireland, and when he went he took me with him, and put me to school at the Convent of the Visitation in Fermanagh."

"And how long did you stay there?"

"Nearly three years."

"And why did you leave it?"

"Because, one day last autumn, while the flowers were still in bloom, Father Francis got a letter. It was so old, and had followed him about to so many places, and was so covered over with post-marks, that he could not tell where it was from till he opened it. Then he saw that it came from a gentleman in this country, who was very anxious to know if a little girl was dead or alive, and where she was, as he was growing old and ill, and wanted to see her before he died. Father Francis said that I was the little girl he wanted."

"If you have not been forbidden to do so, tell the name of the old gentleman who wanted you."

"Oh, no, I have not been forbidden—why should I be? His name was Colonel Malmaison, of Mount Storm."

"Colonel—Malmaison? But go on. After the letter came—what then?"

"Father Francis answered it directly, saying that I was the little girl inquired about. And then he got leave from the bishop, and set out with me for this country. We were two months on the water! Oh! it was very grand! A week ago we got to Baltimore. And we traveled day and night till last night, when we reached Eyrie, and there Father Francis was taken so ill that he could go no farther."

"Father Francis! At Eyrie! And ill! Oh! Heaven!" broke in a low voice from the Abbess. "Go on, my child."

"The inn where we stopped was kept by a widow. Father Francis was not able to rise this morning; but he inquired how far Mount Storm was, and she told him three miles. Then he asked if the family there were all well, and she told him that Colonel Malmaison was lying at the point of death. Then Father Francis grew very anxious, and got out of bed, and said that he must go to Mount Storm; but when he found he could scarcely stand, he had to give it up. Then he asked if there was a conveyance to be had, but the landlady told him no. Then he inquired for a messenger, but there was no messenger to be had, except the landlady's son, who would not be home from school until evening. When I saw he was so anxious, I said that if any one would show me the road, I could take Fido with me, and not be afraid to go. And Father Francis thought that would be the best way. And he said it was my patron saint's day, and very fine weather, and no doubt the roads were good, and that with Fido along with me I could come to no harm. So he wrote a letter while I got ready, and he gave it to me to give to Colonel Malmaison. Then he

gave me his blessing, and told me to start. And I called Fido and set off."

"It was a long and rough walk for a little girl."

"It was a grand walk! and I enjoyed it very much, until the clouds came up, and night came on, and the sky darkened, and the storm arose."

"Poor child!"

"But I got along very well, for Fido walked before me, and I think he could see in the dark, he stepped so sure. Still I was very heedless to have missed Mount Storm."

"And very happy to have done so, my child. You could not possibly have crossed Mad River, and you might have perished in the attempt. Your guardian angel brought you aright."

"Indeed, I think it was Fido, and I like him to have the credit of it."

"Well, my dear, don't you think that good spirits may guide faithful animals sometimes? Now say your prayers, my child, and go to bed; rest well, and to-morrow one of the sisters shall convey you to Mount Storm."

The child kneeled before the altar to offer up her evening prayers. And soon after, the Abbess had the comfort of seeing her in bed, and in a deep, sweet sleep.

Comfort? She stood by the bedside, gazing as one in a trance upon the beautiful young sleeper, as she lay there with one dimpled arm doubled up under the flushed cheek, upon which the long dark eyelashes lay delicately penciled, while the bright, chestnut ringlets clustered thickly around the broad, fair forehead. Long the lady gazed, murmuring,

"The very brow! the very brow! Oh! if ever the Divine set His seal upon a human forehead, He has set it on that angel brow! 'Laglorieuse!' Well named! All night shall I gaze upon that sweet face! May your sleep be deep, little one, that when I draw you to my throbbing heart, you may not feel its beatings! And so he is at Eyrie! at Eyrie!

so near, yet so far! within my reach yet forever beyond it! Said I that I was happy? Oh! fool! Oh! misery—misery beyond computation!"

Almost frenzied was her look, with her corrugated brow, and wild and gleaming eye, as in a distracted manner she reft the vail from her brow, the robe from her shoulders, and threw herself with a gesture of despair upon her knees —not before the crucifix upon the altar, but beside the couch of the sleeping child; and not to pray, but to sob, to groan, and to weep. Long and bitterly she wept, such hopeless tears—falling like a hot rain—as exhaust without relieving the sufferer. With cold and trembling hands she pushed back those heavy masses of dark hair from her burning forehead; and as the ribbon that confined them slipped off, those rich tresses fell and rolled, wave after wave, in purplish lustre, down upon a neck and bosom, white, polished, and beautifully moulded as the bust of the Medicean statue.

The storm of grief raved itself into quietness at length.

Rising, she gathered up her fugitive locks, wound them around her head, and throwing herself upon the bed, and supporting her throbbing brow upon her hand, she remained gazing upon the features of the sleeping child—drinking in as it were to her thirsty heart, an eternal memory of the face that had come to bless her vision for a night, to leave it forever in the morning.

CHAPTER IV.

MOUNT STORM.

How shocking must thy summons be, O death!
To him that is at ease in his possessions.
Who counting on long years of pleasure here,
Is quite unfurnished for the world to come!—*Blair.*

All was quiet in the sick room.

Strong oaken shutters without, thick canvas blinds within, and heavy crimson moreen curtains warmly lined, and let down from ceiling to floor, kept out all sound of the storm. A thick, soft Turkey carpet, stole all noises from the feet of her who glided through the chamber. The ormolu clock on the mantle-piece had been stopped, lest the noise of its ticking, sounding preternaturally loud in the stillness of the room, should fret the ear of the sleeper.

The taper of chased gold that stood upon the ebony stand between the two windows, was shaded with a green globe. Before the glowing fire in the grate, stood a Chinese screen of green silk that tempered the light and heat.

Heavy crimson moreen curtains, warmly lined like those at the windows, hung from tester to rollers, around the tall four-posted bedstead, upon which lay the form of a dying man—Colonel Malmaison, of Mount Storm and Red Ridge.

The watcher in his room was Ada Malmaison, the widow of his younger son. A slight noise from within the curtains, caught the attentive ear of the soft-footed lady.

"Ada?"

"My dear father!"

"Where are you—I do not see you my child."

"Here I am, dear father," she said, gliding to the bedside and putting back the curtain.

"Ada! there came a letter, and there is a ship in—did I not hear some one say so—or—how was it, Ada?"

"You only fancied it, dear sir. Your head has been a little excited; you are better now."

"Ah! you think I am wandering in mind, but I am not—I am not. Oh! Ada, I dreamed—I dreamed. Has there been no news in yet, Ada?"

"No, my dear sir, there could not be, you know, since there has been no vessel in."

"Oh! Ada, I have had such a dream! I saw in my dream the wildest gorge of the north mountain in night, tempest, and black darkness, yet I saw a young child toiling through the thick driving storm, among the dreadful steeps. I thought I had to help her down the pass. Oh! how often and how fearfully we slipped, and caught ourselves, and pitched headlong, and recovered our position as by a miracle."

"Such unpleasant dreams are not uncommon with persons of disordered nerves, dear father."

"At last I thought I got her safely to the valley, and I thought it was poor Eustace's orphan child, and I turned to clasp her to my heart, and in my joy woke up."

"Your nerves have been very much excited, dear sir," said the low-voiced lady, gliding away to the ebony stand before mentioned, upon which stood the shaded taper, some phials and a glass, into which she poured a dark liquid from one of the phials. Returning, she said—

"Take this sedative—"

"I will not take it—it would benumb my faculties, and I want them all now."

"Do take it, sir; it will compose you, you will sleep again, and wake with your mind all the brighter."

"I will not take it, girl. It will 'compose' me—yes!

into insensibility. I shall 'sleep' again—yes! the last sleep! and 'wake again with my mind all the brighter'—yes! in another world! No, Ada, I will *not* take it. I have something to do in this world yet. I will *not* sleep again until I have done justice to that poor child."

"Oh! dear sir, be contented. The dear child of whom you speak, we *know* to be beyond our poor human aid; she is provided for among the many mansions of her heavenly Father's kingdom."

"We do *not* know that. We have no certain proof of it. Oh! fool that I was, to take the truth of that account of her death for granted! But it may not be too late yet. Ada, ring that bell."

"Dear father, what is it that you want? Can *I* not wait upon you?"

"You cannot go to Eyrie for a lawyer to-night! for that is what I want! Ring the bell, Ada!"

"Father, the household has retired long ago, every servant is asleep in bed."

"Go and rouse one of the men, then—tell him to take the fleetest horse in the stable, and go at once for Mr. Ferguson, and bring him here to-night. Quick, girl!—quick! —my strength fails."

"Father, it is after midnight—an awful storm is raging out of doors. You cannot hear it in this thickly-closed and curtained room; but it is the worst storm I ever knew."

"I cannot help that. It will not kill a man to ride through it. Go! rouse Dick; tell him to ride to Eyrie, and bring back Mr. Ferguson with him. I will double—I will quadruple the lawyer's fee. I will pay him his own price! There! he will come on those terms!"

"Father, listen to that deep roar—it is Mad River, swollen by the storm to a raging flood! impassable by man or beast. We are hemmed in for the night, sir."

"Is it so? Oh, Eustace, Eustace! must your child be beggared as well as orphaned?"

"Dear father, try to calm your nerves, and exercise your own clear reason. Reflect, sir, that when you were in sound health of mind and body, you accepted the convincing evidence of that child's death, without the slightest hesitation and only now that you are ill, do you afflict yonrself with doubts of its authenticity. Your doubts, like your dream, dear sir, are only the bad effects of your disordered nerves. If you were well again, you would not be disturbed by them. Take these drops the doctor left for you, sir. They will calm your excitement."

"No, no, dear Ada!—you mean well, but I have no faith in those treacherous narcotics, that give a dying man an easy death, because it is an unconscious one!"

"You are far from being a dying man, dear father. You are only nervous. There—let me lay my hand upon your forehead—it may help your head."

"Thank you, Ada! Oh! that hand is very cool and soothing: bless that hand—it is as soothing as the narcotic without being seductive to reason," said the dying man, as the mesmeric touch fell gently on his forehead. Presently, "Ada," he said, "do you really think she is safe in Heaven?"

"I have not the slightest doubt of it, sir!"

"But, oh, my Ada! if she is *not!*"

"If she is still upon this earth, sir—your verbal will shall be obeyed as implicitly as your written one could be fulfilled!"

"How, Ada—how?" inquired the patient, drowsily.

"Why, thus—though I could not touch the half you have left to my child, your grandchild—yet the other half that your bounty has conferred upon me, should be equally divided with the child of Eustace, if living."

"Would you do that, Ada?"

"I would."

"Ada! do you promise your dying father to do that for the orphan child, if she can be found?"

"Yes, sir, I do promise."

"Will you swear to perform your promise, my Ada?"

"Yes! I swear to do it."

"Ah, who is like my Ada? my Ruth? my angel? for she has given sweet peace to my dying hours," murmured the old man to himself, like one about to sink to sleep.

Ada Malmaison stole from his side, took the glass containing the opiate, returned, slipped her arm under his head, placed the glass to his lips, and murmured,

"You woke in a fright just now, your nerves were agitated, take this for me, it will soothe you," and before the half-mesmerized man could recollect his objections, he had mechanically obeyed her, swallowed the narcotic, and fallen back in a heavy sleep.

She let down the curtains around his bed, went slowly, with her noiseless tread, and subdued the light of the taper, and then sat down in her cushioned chair, scarcely breathing, lest she might awake the sleeper.

An hour passed away.

The wind, that for a space had lulled, now suddenly rising with tenfold fury, shook the house.

The sleeping man started up in a panic.

"Ada! Ada! have you sent off a messenger for the lawyer? If not—send, Ada! Quick! quick! or it will be too late."

Swiftly and softly she was at his side, her right arm around his shoulders, her left hand holding the glass to his lips—her voice murmuring in his ear.

"Yes—yes, I have sent. Swallow this, it will give you strength for the interview."

And ere the instinct of self-preservation had taken the

alarm, the sufferer had quaffed the stupefying drug, and dropped back in the same deep sleep.

"I wonder how long this is to continue? how often this scene must be re-enacted to-night? If he wakes again, I will increase the dose," said the watcher, as she put down the glass, and resumed her seat.

Again and again was that scene re-enacted.

Again and again was the dying sleeper roused up, as by some trumpet-call of conscience; and again and again, ere he became fully sentient, was placed to his lips the stupefying narcotic, which he swallowed mechanically, only to fall back into a temporary living death.

It was a fearful night without! How the wind roared, and howled, and shrieked around the house! shaking the strong roof, and the firm windows, and the thick walls until they trembled at its power. How the spirit of the storm seemed now that of some lost soul, howling in its despair; and now like the voice of some avenging demon, about to shake the firm foundation of the building into ruins.

And it was a fearful night *within*, with the starts and panics of the dying man, pursued by remorse, and the cold fixidity of purpose in that fell watcher, with her ready narcotic, to make that remorse forever ineffectual.

So the war went on without and within.

The night waned—the morning dawned.

Without—the storm having spent its fury, subsided into calm.

Within—the constitution of the dying man having exhausted all its force of resistance, succumbed to the power of the drug, and he lay in a dull lethargy.

Even the watcher, sitting back in her downy chair, with her head sunk forward upon her chest, and her arms hanging down beside her, slept the deep sleep of fatigue.

The sun arose, but no single ray could penetrate that thickly curtained, "doubly darkened" chamber. The

watcher slept on; and she might still have slept on, but that a gentle knock at the door was followed by the cautious opening of the same, and a stealthy step, and a low, respectful voice in her ear, saying,

"The doctor is down stairs, will I show him up, ma'am?"

"No—help me to arrange my dress. First pour some water into that basin, and empty a half bottle of cologne into it, and lay out more napkins. There, now, hand me a brush, and get me that white merino morning gown."

With nimble hands the woman helped her mistress to complete her hasty toilet.

"Now go bring the doctor up, Bridget," said the lady, as she finished fastening the last cord and tassel.

As the woman left the chamber, Ada went to one of the windows nearly opposite the foot of the bed, looped back the heavy curtains, drew up the thick blinds, and opened the shutters, letting in a flood of morning sunshine.

As she stood there in the full light of day—what a woman she looked! How exceedingly beautiful, yet with what a strange style of beauty!—a beauty at once attractive and repulsive—a beauty that fascinated the eye, haunted the imagination, yet repelled the heart. She was an albino of the purest type, tall and slim, yet not thin, for her slender form and graceful limbs were beautifully rounded. Her little head was cast in the Grecian mould. Her features were small, regular, and very clearly cut. Like Parian marble for their pure whiteness, polish, and exquisite finish, were the features of that perfect face. Her hair, of the palest gold tint, approaching white, was parted over the low, receding forehead, rolled in soft waves down each side the bluish temples, wound around and gathered in a graceful fall of ringlets over a comb at the back of her head. But in strange contrast to her pure white complexion and golden-white hair, eyebrows and eyelashes, were her eyes so small and dark as to be always taken for black, but could

you have met their carefully guarded gaze, you would have found them changeable—alternating green and gray—coldly brilliant, treacherous, and repellant. Yet a basilisk's fatal power to charm they had if once you fell under their spell. Her hate was baleful, but her love was fatal. A woman, she was, of a type it has never yet been my task to set, without genius, without passions, yet not without appetites;—calm-blooded, cold-hearted, clear-headed;—crafty, sensual, selfish, and rapacious;—whose avarice and ambition were hungers rather than enthusiasms;—whose power lay not in strength of intellect, but in strength of will, unscrupulousness of means, directness of aim, and singleness of object. Her type, the sword-fish, who aims but to strike, and strikes but once. As "Xyphias to his mark," so she to her object.

"Good morning, Mrs. Malmaison," said the physician, in a low voice, breaking the lady's reverie as he entered the room.

He was a very fine looking man, tall, well-proportioned, with Roman features, dark, brilliant gray eyes, black hair, and black whiskers meeting under his chin.

The lady smiled sweetly, but gravely, as she went to meet him, saying, in almost a whisper,

"Good morning, Doctor Thogmorton."

The physician approached the bed, and after regarding the dying man some minutes, inquired,

"How did he pass the night, madam?"

"Very badly, sir; full of nervous excitability, starts, panics, and tremors, verging at times upon delirium."

"Ah! you gave him the composing draught regularly?"

"Yes—yet at first it produced only a temporary effect."

The doctor made such examination of his patient as the nature of the circumstances admitted, and then wrote a prescription, and handing it to the lady, said,

"Should the Colonel wake, madam, and suffer a return

of the symptoms of last night, give him this mixture, according to these written directions. And should any *other* change take place, madam, you will please to let me know immediately. And pray give yourself some repose, dear lady. Good day."

The physician left the room. The lady touched the bell. Her maid entered.

"Bridget! admit no soul—neither man, woman, nor child to the house to-day! Let none of the servants come up stairs upon any pretext whatever. Tell them that the noise will disturb their master; and now go and serve my breakfast in the next room."

The woman having received these directions, left the chamber to fulfill them. And in a few minutes the lady passed into the outer room, where her breakfast was placed on a stand before her, while Bridget stood in attendance. She had scarcely tasted her tea, when—Hark! what sound was that? it came from the room of the patient—a heavy, labored breathing, a struggle, and then the death rattle.

Ada started from her almost untasted meal, and hastened into the chamber of death.

Ah! neither nurse nor physician need have feared his relapse into the horrors of the preceding night—his sufferings were well-nigh over, he was in his last agony—the purple shadows of death had settled in the hollows of the cheeks and temples; the cold dew of death had beaded on the pallid forehead; the film of death had come over the fixed eyes.

She drew near and gazed upon those mortal throes with a steady eye and an unchanging cheek—and wiped the clammy moisture from the cold brow and lips, and took the poor wrist in her hands, and with her fingers on the pulse, watched the ebbing tide of life as it beat—slowly—more slowly, till it ceased forever. Yet a little longer she held that wasted hand, to be sure, quite sure that all was over—

that it would never more make or mar a will. Yes! it was over! the long struggle was past, the battle was fought and won, and she was victorious! She would venture to sleep now!

CHAPTER V.

AN OLD FAMILY SERVANT.

He draweth out the thread of his verbosity finer than the staple of his argument.—*Shakspeare.*

"WELL! Marse Colonel's gone! We mus' *all* go when our time come, childun! ebery singly mudder's son and darter ob us! all hab to pay dat debt of nature! wonder who first 'tracted it! can't put it off dough! who eber first run up de bill! when de 'count persented we'se jes got to settle it right on de nail! no supercedin', no gettin' security! no takin' de benefit ob de act ob 'solvency—*no!* mus' settle right up! no tellin' de collector to call agin, you'll pay nex' time—*no!* mus' settle right up!"

This oration was pronounced by Pharaoh, once the late Colonel Malmaison's own man, but now, for some years past, superannuated.

As Pharaoh was rather an original, it may be necessary to give you some idea of his personal appearance, as he stood upon the kitchen hearth, with his back to the fire, and his coat tails under his arms, delivering his opinions upon matters and things in general, and the family bereavement in particular.

Pharaoh was so black, so tall, and so thin, that he might have served as a model for the illustration of a comic almanac. His appearance would have been dismally spectral, but for a full, bushy suit of hair, as white as cotton wool,

which, with white eyebrows, and white beard, formed the most glaring and laughable contrast to the jet blackness of his skin. And if in a fit of graciousness, Pharaoh smiled, displaying a long, double row of ivory teeth, or if in a solemn mood, he turned up the whites of his eyes, this effect of contrast was increased tenfold.

As Pharaoh had little else to do in this world but to take care of himself, he faithfully performed that first of duties.

He quite eschewed the homespun cloth worn by the other servants, and as he always succeeded to his master's cast-off clothing, he preferred to wear *them*. So he generally appeared in a well brushed, though rusty and threadbare suit of black, with a white cravat, and but for his *color*, might have been taken for a poor clergyman, or a decayed gentleman. He loved to refer to himself in his youth as a wild, young blade, and now to affect the experienced man of the world. He was also something of a philosopher, and of course the oracle of wisdom to the kitchen.

His audience now consisted of his sister Dido, the cook, his two nieces, Servia and Dorcas, and Mrs. Brunton, the poor widow, who had been called into assist in the grave duties that they had just completed.

"I do suppose he's done gone and lef' ebery cent o' de property to *she* too!" he continued, looking around upon his hearers.

"Well, ole man, who would he leave his property to 'cept to his own dear, widdered darter-in-law and her son, as is his own dear gran'son?" asked the widow.

"Who? Mrs. Brunton, you's a white lady," said Pharaoh, bowing low, "and we-dem is pussons ob color—but I hopes we's all frien's *here?* I hope dere is no one wid in de soun' o' my voice as 'ould make mischief in de *fam'ly.*"

"If you mean *me*, ole man, you know I'd die afore I'd make mischief *any*where," said the widow.

"I b'lieves it ob you, Missus Brunton. I meant no disserspect; but only made my 'marks in a gen'al way 'fore enterin' on de 'ticlar 'scussion o' de subjec' in han'—which was, who should our late demented frien' and marser lef' his property to? *I* sez—which it is my hopes we *all* sez—to his own, dear dutiful, first born son; de son of his firstest marriage, Marse Eustace, ef he is livin', an' ef not, to his darter, case she ebber should be 'skivered! Cause why? Why, cause all dis property, an' what's more'n dat, *me myself too*, come 'long of *Marse Eustace's an' Miss Eustacia's mother*, who was a lady born. An' none at all come wid de secon' wife, who was de mother ob his younges' son, Marse Philly, to *which, his* widow and chile—ole Marse—*he* has done lef' all de property!"

"Now, who de debbil done make you so smart? How you know all dat?" put in his sister Dido, to whom all Pharaoh's share of flesh seemed unjustly to have fallen, she was so fat and unwieldy.

"Ah! I done bin seein' how things bin goin' on! I see de trail 'o de sarpint—de trail o' de sarpint—creep, creep, —crawl, crawl! Well! Marse Colonel done gone; it's my hopes he went *fair*, dat's all!"

"Good gracious, ole man, you—you don't mean *that*—"

"Yes, I do mean jes' *dat.*"

"You—you turn me sick," said the widow, growing white about the lips; "if I thought so, I couldn't stay in the house a minit. I should stifle! *poison!* heavens! urh-rh-rh! urh-rh-rh!"

"P'ison! hush! no! what a horrid word! dat's a hanging word—dat is! *You* said it, not me."

"What do you mean, then? Urh! urh! you make my blood run cold 'long o' your looks an' grimaces!"

"I means jes *dis! Did—you—nebber—heern—tell—ob —de*—EBIL EYE?"

"Urh! Urh-rh-rh! no! *don't roll yourn so!* You

make me feel like I was in the house with the Witch-of-Indor!"

"Well, den! now listen to me *good* while I tell you something. If I was a lady, or a gemman, I shouldn't like to be any whar in Miss Ada's *way*, ef she didn't want me dar—cause I should be dead sure o' having to get *out* ob her way! I shouldn't want Miss Ada to want me *dead*, cause I should be sartain some day soon arter to go dead! I takes 'tickalar notice dat eberything she wants to happen —*happens*. Eberything she wants to go on—*goes on*. Eberything she wants to stop—*stops*. Ef she wants anybody as is an eye sore to her out of her sight—*dey travels*. Ef she wants anybody—no matter how far off dey may be—*in* her sight—*dar dey is*. She ain't got no more heart nor a white herring, same time ef she wants anybody to love her—*dey goes ravin' stracted mad arter her!* Ef she wants anybody to die—*dey dies*. An' hush, honey! ef she wants anybody to be born—*dey are born*. Dar. I's summed up her *corrector*, an' I could prove it by summin' up of her *history*."

"Yes! much *you* know of her history or anybody else," exclaimed Dido, testily, for she felt that Pharaoh was "letting his tongue run before his wit," in other words, talking indiscreetly.

"I mean her history since *here* she's bin! Firs' place she's a furriner, which, of course, you couldn't expect much of *sich!* same time I'm willin' to make 'lowance for sich, 'vided dey 'ducks derselves properly, comin' inter comp'ny like *dis*," here Pharaoh made a circular bow to his audience.

"Well, it is dreadful," said the widow, "to think how in so few years all this fine family, so prosperous, an' so promising, should a'perished one may say out of the land! And none be left but this foreign 'oman and her child."

"Listen, children!" said Pharaoh, gravely. "Der be

two deffunt sort of ruinations as may come to a house! An' de one may be liken' to de fire as blazes all in a sudden an' 'sumes eberything to cinders in an hour, an' leaves behind it nothing but a heap of black ashes, which hows'ever, don't taint the *air;* or it may be liken' to tempest as comes wid wind an' rain an' flood, and sweeps eberything to 'struction in a minnit, but leaves nothing baleful behind —an' *dis* is debblish bad passions, when brudder rises up agin brudder in a fam'ly, and Cain slayges Abel! an' makes a gen'al wrack o' things all of a suddent an' forever, an' a-done wid it! *But oh! childun! de oder ruination.* It may be liken' to de mildew as creeps an' creeps—cold an' damp an' slow—cold an' damp an' slow—up de wall, an' troo de wall, an' inter de parlor, an' inter de chamber, inter de closet, till eberything eberywhere is cold an' damp an' clammy; spotted, musty, an' pisenous—in de cellar an' de garret, in de parlor an' de chamber, in de cradle an' de couch, eberywhere! eberywhere! And dat mildew is cold blooded, 'ce'itful, cruel, househol' treach'ry!" said Pharaoh, shaking his white head and throwing up his trembling hands with a wild, weird manner, peculiar to himself, as he stalked away.

CHAPTER VI.

NELL.

In truth she was a strange and wayward child,
Fond of each gentle and each dreadful scene,
In darkness and in storm and winter wild,
No less than when on Nature's face serene,
The summer sun diffused his morning sheen.—*Beattie.*

"UNCLE PHARAOH! where's Blaise? There's about a hundred thousand millions of snowbirds down on Mad River," exclaimed a little girl, breaking open the kitchen

door, shaking a shower of snow from her skirts and shoes, and panting for breath, as she stood waiting impatiently for an answer.

Her obstreperous entree drew at once upon her the eyes of all the little circle around the kitchen stove.

And in truth she presented rather a singular appearance. Her name—Miss Helen Wildman, at your service, reader, a relative of Mr. Bazil Wildman, of Red Ridge, and at present a guest at will of Mount Storm.

She was about ten years of age, in stature scarcely seeming so many, yet in face looking almost any imaginable number of years old, her little visage was so weird and witch-like. Her little figure was thin almost to emaciation. Her skin was pale and dark, nearly to gipsy darkness. Her hair was jet black, lustrous, long and straight as an Indian's, and hung down her shoulders, and reached below her waist. Her eyebrows, also jet black, and shining like water-leeches, arched a pair of eyes in piquant contrast to her whole complexion. Those eyes were light gray generally, yet of no permanently fixed color; being in gladness or in excitement bright, sparkling, blazing, now blue, now gray, now green, as, springing about from object to object, they flashed rays of light wherever they fell; or, in sadness and thought, under the deep vail of their drooping lids and long, black lashes, they smouldered into a dull, uncertain brown or black. She wore a dress of broad-striped linsey, of many colors, alternately crimson, black, blue and orange. A broad-brimmed, black felt hat, adorned with a drooping crimson feather, and tied loosely under her chin with a crimson ribbon, had fallen back upon her shoulders. And red stockings and black boots completed her dress, which was altogether rather the worse for wear and tear. She now stood leaning on a cross-bow, as tall as herself, with her eyes dancing from one object to another as she waited for her answer.

"What de chile say? What dat you say, honey?" asked Dido.

"I say, where's Blaise? There's more than a hundred thousand millions of snowbirds down on Mad River!"

"Oh! go 'long, right 'traight out'n dis here kitchen, wid your 'raculous stories, Miss Nelly! go!"

"Well, I don't care, there were a *thousand*, anyhow, or else there must have been a *hundred*," said Nell, nodding her head, in the most absolute manner, and increasing her emphasis as she lessened her numbers.

"Dar! now you talkin'! now you comin' toward the trufe! Dat's allers de way long o' you! You goes up like a rocket, an' comes down like a stick! You allers raises a great cry when der's werry little wool! a great smoke, when der's no fire! Dat's you!"

"I asked you where Blaise was? *Will* you tell me where Blaise is?"

"How de mischif *I* know anything 'bout Blaise, chile? I ain't seen no Blaise since long afore Christmas."

"He said he was coming over here very early this morning," said Nell, with an air of vexation.

"Now what de chile want long o' Blaise—want him to set trap to catch snowbirds for you, I s'pose!"

"Set traps for snowbirds? No! I'd scorn to set traps!" exclaimed Nell, quickly.

"*Whipp! honey!* don't bite my poor ole head off. I'd like to know what's the harm o' settin' traps."

"It's so mean, it's so cunning, and deceitful and treacherous to set traps! I hate and despise and scorn traps! You raise a trap like a little roof of a house, and you spread a feast of crumbs under it, as much as to say—'Come, little storm-beaten, hungry wayfarer, here is shelter and food for you; here is a nice little house that I have built, and a table that I have laid especially for you! I know the air is biting cold, and the earth is now barren, because the snow covers

all your food; and the forest has no shelter for you because the icicles hang from the trees for leaves. Then come, hungry and half-frozen little stranger, come under this snug roof that I have raised for you, and eat from this board that I have spread for you.' And the pretty, trusting creatures, dart into the trap, but before they have picked a grain—instantly the treacherous roof falls and crushes them to death! Oh! it is past mean! Why, the wild Arabs of the Desert know better, for if their bitterest enemy eats at their board he is sacred from harm! And I'd just as soon pilfer from the poor-box at the church door as set a trap for a bird!"

"Dar now! tell you all so! Jes' listen to dat gal! on'y jes' set her off wid a word, an' *whiff!* like a spark in a powder can! she's off! she'll preach you a 'ration in de time you bat you eye! An' den she's so *'sistent*, too! She won't set trap for bird! not she! but—what she gwine do 'long o' dat *bow-arrow*?"

"I'm going to shoot with it."

"Oh! you's gwine to shoot wid it! not de poor, dear, innercen' birds—*dey* mus'n be to'ched, you know," said Dido, ironically.

"Yes, I am! I know it's wrong, too! but I can't help it! At any rate it is not so bad as setting a trap for them, though. I do nothing deceitful, nothing treacherous; I'd *scorn* it, I tell you! No! but I go with my bow and arrow and wait till I see a cloud of snowbirds rise in the air, and then I take aim, cry 'Look out for yourselves, little fellows,' and let fly my shaft in the midst of the flock! If I strike one I strike him *dead* at once—he has not suffered—for one minute he was on the wing, and the next, without knowing how he got there, in the bird's heaven."

"Now, dere's anoder 'ration! an' all about a bird's heaben, too! Pray, Miss Nelly, what would Fader Simeon

say to dat? Oh! you little hairtick! whar *does* you 'spect to go to when you die?—to de birds' heaben, maybe!"

"I don't know but I *should* like to go there!"

"An' take your bows an' arrows, too!"

"Yes," replied Nell, disregarding the uplifted hands and eyes of her monitress. Then quickly changing the current of her thoughts, she grew restless, and exclaimed, in an irritable mood, "Oh, *where is* Blaise? he promised to be here early this morning! Why *don't* he come along! It's past nine o'clock now."

"How de wengeance does you 'spect he's gwine to get ober Mad River arter such a storm as dat las' night?"

"Oh! easy enough! Why, the water has gone down ever so much! The river can be crossed as well as need be. Just before I ran in here, I saw one of the sisters from the convent crossing the ford! Ha, ha, ha! Oh! they looked so queer! the *party* did, I mean! the sister all shrouded in black, and a little girl in a red cloak and hood; and both riding on a white donkey—the little girl was riding behind the sister, holding on with her arms around her waist; and they had a great tawny bull-dog following them!"

"Humph! dere's *anoder* 'raculous story!"

"Why, Dido!" exclaimed the child, with flashing eyes, "do you mean to hint that what I say is not true?"

"N-n-no, chile! I doesn't mean to say *dat*. I on'y means dat you stretches ob de trufe 'till it' a'most breaks in two—likewise also dat you *'maginates* things as isn't always true, an' tell 'em as *sich!* I doesn't blame you, chile! cause it's your nature, an' you can't help of it," replied Dido, with an air of toleration.

"I wish! oh! how I *do* wish somebody else had said that of me besides you! somebody that it would not be *mean* to punish for the insult! for if I were to tell of this, you know what would be the end of it, Dido!"

"Yes!—now go raise a fuss here—"

"You are sure I won't, Dido, and that is the reason you feel free to affront me."

"I *would* now, if I was you! Oh! *do please* now go and raise a fuss roun' de house de very mornin' as your poor, dear, ole step-uncle-in-law lays dead on his bed!"

"Eh!" exclaimed the child, suddenly changing color.

"Yes! do pray now! *you* don't owe him nuffin, you don't! he nebber was good to *you* in his life! he never guv *you* nuffin, no more he didn't."

"*Dead! oh! dead!*"

"Yes, honey, yes! Sure we'se all got to die. My goodness alive, chile, git out'n dis yer way! Stop! don't drap! don't fall down! least ways, not till I git to yer, hold on to the chair! Lor', Lor', who'd a thought it would a' took sich an effect on her!" said Dido, as she rolled her round body toward the spot where Nelly, pale and still, leaned against the wall. She was so dark, that her change of color only betrayed itself in the pallid lips, stricken apart with the shock she had received, while her eyes, started and dilated, were fixed in an agony of questioning upon the face of the old negro; and her faltering tongue repeated mechanically, incredulously, as one unable or unwilling to receive the truth,

"Dead! dead!"

"Miss Nelly! Miss Nelly, chile! Don't do so! don't!" said Dido, laying her hand upon the little girl's shoulder; but with one half suppressed scream, Nelly shook off the messenger of grief as she would have shaken off the grief itself, and then turned, pulled open the door, and fled, as if she would outrun and escape her first trouble, that nevertheless pursued her, kept up with her, clung to her, and like a cleaving garment, remained with her.

Old Dido could not go after her; the idea was prepos-

terous. She could only lift up both her hands in a sort of pity and amazement, and ejaculated,

"Dat de way! dat de way she take ebery thing! ebery thing! ebery thing! ebery thing in *excess!* If de sun shines, she thinks all de yeth is a fire wid it! If a cloud come ober it, she thinks it's a total 'clipse! If a rain fall, she sees Noah's flood! If a deep snow come, she thinks—she thinks—" here Dido, never having heard of the avalanches among the Alps, or of the climate in the Arctic regions, came to a halt for the want of a hyperbole, until happening, by association, to think of the snowbirds, she took up the thread of her argument again with—"an' if dere's a han'ful o' snowbirds in de bresh, she sees a million of millions! 'Sides which, ebery body is either a angel or a debil wid *her*, an' she hates jes' as hard as she loves! But I means to try to break her ob her ways, 'case I thinks it's my duty to de poor mudderless gal! Dar! I wonner who de wengeance dat is!" exclaimed Dido, breaking off in the midst of her soliloquy, as she heard the hall door-bell ring. "Well, dar! I'm comin'—you need'n' pul de bell down! dough I mos' wish you would, 'cause nobody 'bout here could put it up agin, an' den I should nebber have its racket to sturve me in my meditations! Dar! well, I'm comin'!" she repeated, as she rolled her little round body, as rapidly as possible toward the hall, to answer the reiterated appeals of the bell.

The door had not been opened that morning; all the outgoers from the house had used the back-door; and now it was so clogged on the outside with drifted snow, and frozen up with ice, that Dido had a great deal of difficulty in pulling it open. At last it gave way, and Dido, with a frightened exclamation of "Lor' save my soul!" tumbled back and rolled down, as a huge bull-dog rushed in and passed over her.

But the dog was followed by a nun in her black habit

and vail, and by a little girl in a scarlet cloak and hood, who immediately laid her hand on the dog's neck, while Dido tumbled upon her feet, and the Sister, advancing, said,

"Good-morning, aunty. How is Colonel Malmaison this morning?"

"Good-mornin' to *yourself*, Sister Angela! How does you do, ma'am? Lor', Lor', what a *brute!* made no more o' walkin' right ober me an' ef I'd been his ekals! Dear, dear, chile! how *did* you ebber git cross de river?—Lor'-a-massy! upon top o' me, ef dat brute ain't tuk all my breaf wid de *scare* he's put on me! Whose little *gal* is dat? But, dear me, Sister—I ax yer *pardon*, ma'am—here I is talkin' an' keepin' of yer in de *cole hall*. Come in out'n de *cole*, sister! Come out'n de *cole*, chile!—Here, come inter dis *parlor*. I s'pose dey's made a *fire* here dis mornin'! leastways I hopes dey has, dough we's bin so much *upsot* wid what has happen', an' I myse'f has so much on my *mind* dat I'm not able to 'tend to nothin', an' de gals, an' dat good-for-nothin' *white nigger*, Briddy, has ebery thing her own way in de house, which likewise, her worfless, drunten *brudder*, Jimmy, has *his* on de plantashun! It wer' *my* hopes der'd be a change! Yes! here *is* a fire for a won'er!" said Dido, as having waddled to a door on the left-hand side of the hall she opened it, and admitted the visitors into a snug, comfortable parlor, green carpeted and green curtained, and warmed by a glowing coal fire in a grate. "Sit down an' get warm, Sister, honey! sit down here by sister, little gal! dere's room for both ob you!" said Dido, wheeling up a great green sofa toward the fire. "Get out, yer brute!—does dey 'vite great dogs to take a seat in de parlor where *you* come from?"

This latter courtesy was addressed to the dog, and accompanied by a menace with the poker. But Fido, who had laid himself quietly down at the feet of his mistress,

now slightly raised his head, and replied with a low growl, which rather decided Dido not to prosecute the war any farther.

"He is a good-hearted dog, aunty, but he doesn't know how to return *good* for evil, any more than human beings do, and so, if you speak cross, and threaten him, he will be sure to growl back; and if you were to strike him, he *might* bite you. It is dogs' nature, you know, and human nature, too. I will put him out if you want him to go," said the little girl.

"No, let him stay if he'll 'have hisself proper, honey," said Dido, replacing the poker in its ring.

"And now, aunty, will you reply to my question," asked Sister Angela, "and tell me how the Colonel is this morning, and whether we can see him?"

"De Colonel! Ah, chile! we's all poor mortal sinners! Marse Colonel 'parted dis life dis mornin' 'bout little arter sunrise!"

"What do you tell me! That Colonel Malmaison—"

"Is breave his las'—which dere ought to bin *crape* on de door to warn wisitors o' what had happen', on'y de un'ertaker is not riv, and dere's no crape in der house."

"I am very sorry to hear it!"

"Oh, it don't much matter 'bout it, chile, 'cause werry few people can get ober here dis mornin', an' de crape will be on all right an' proper afore noon."

"I spoke of the Colonel. I am truly grieved to hear of his death. How is his daughter? How is Mrs. Malmaison, poor lady?"

"Oh, chile! done shet herse'f up in her room, an' won't let any body come near her, 'cept 'tis dat white nigger, Briddy Dirty!"

"Poor lady! I will remember her in my prayers; and you, Genevieve, must say the rosary of the Five Doleful Mysteries for her. Where is Bridget Dougherty? can you

find her, aunty, and call her to me? I must send her with a message to her mistress. It seems very hard to interrupt the lady in her retirement, upon such an occasion, but as this child concerns her more than any one else, I am sure she would not like the interview to be delayed."

"Yes, chile, I know where to come at she," said Dido, trundling herself out of the room.

But she need not have moved; for, not far from the door, she came full tilt upon Bridget, who was making the best of her way to the parlor.

CHAPTER VII.

SISTER ANGELA.

Oh! her smile, it seems half holy,
As if drawn from thoughts more far
Than our common jestings are.
And if any painter drew her,
He would draw her, unaware,
With a halo round her hair.—*E. B. Browning.*

Reverentially, Bridget Dougherty saluted the Sister, and stood waiting her commands.

Sister Angela explained her wishes, and Bridget left the room to fulfill them.

And while the woman is gone, let me describe the fair girl, whose enthusiasm had led her to adopt the laborious and self-denying life of a Sister of Charity.

She was of medium height, slight and fragile in form, of very fair, transparent complexion, with large hollow, dreamy blue eyes, and a pale, high forehead, elevated with benevolence and veneration. The close black cap and scuttle bonnet concealed every vestige of her flaxen hair,

while the ample black shawl shrouded the outlines of the delicate figure.

A stepmother with daughters of her own, and them a second brood of children, had made her presence unnecessary and almost unwelcome in her father's house, while the fervor of her veneration and benevolence had impelled her to the ministering life of a self-dedicated servant of the poor, the sick, the sinful, and the imprisoned. And who shall blame her zeal, though that zeal wasted her own life, while it served and blessed so many other lives?

When Bridget had closed the door behind her, Sister Angela turned to Genevieve, who, since hearing the anouncement of Colonel Malmaison's death, had remained up to this time in pensive silence, and took her hand, and while pressing it affectionately, said,

"I am very sorry for you, my dear child, but I hope and believe that Mrs. Malmaison will prove a kind friend to you."

"I do not mind about myself at all. I am thinking about the old gentleman. It must be so sad to wait and long for any one's coming, and then, without seeing them, die. And Father Francis! It will be such a grievous disappointment to him."

"The aged man rests in peace, we trust; Father Francis, as a faithful servant of heaven, will bend to the hand that never wounds but to heal."

As the gentle nun ceased speaking, the door opened, and Bridget appeared and invited them to walk up into her mistress's room, where the latter was waiting to receive their visit.

Sister Angela and Genevieve arose, and Fido got up and shook himself, preparatory to accompanying them.

But the child laid her hand upon his head, and bade him remain where he was and wait for their return. And he laid himself down again accordingly.

They left the room, passed down the broad hall, and up the wide staircase that led to an upper hall, from which three doors on either hand led into different suites of rooms. This hall was furnished as a library, the walls being lined with book-cases and pictures, after the following manner: Over the doors were hung family portraits, while the spaces between the doors were fitted up with well filled book-shelves. A green carpet on the floor, a round reading-table covered with a green cloth, a settee, and several easy-chairs covered with green damask, and lastly, a tall cylinder stove, completed the appointments of the hall library, which terminated at its front or eastern extremity, in a green curtained bay window, situated immediately over the main front entrance of the house.

Bridget conducted the visitors up the whole length of this hall, and opening the last door on the left hand, admitted them into a room immediately over the parlor into which they had first been introduced.

The waiting woman closed the door and retired. And Sister Angela and Genevieve found themselves in a chamber, fitted up with a refinement of comfort that would, at any other time, have arrested their attention. The bed-curtains, window curtains, and chair and sofa covers, were all of blue satin damask, and white lace, and the Brussels carpet was of a white ground, with a running vine of blue water lilies. A screen of blue and white silk, with a transparency representing Juno throned amid the clouds, stood before the glowing grate.

On a luxurious couch, amid silk covered cushions of down, reclined the lady. Without rising, she motioned Sister Angela and the child to approach and be seated.

Sister Angela wheeled up a low sofa, and she and the child sat down.

The nun, in a gentle voice, began to express her sympathy and condolence with the lady in her bereavement.

But Mrs. Malmaison, whose eyes were riveted upon the

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face of the little girl, suddenly interrupted her by inquiring, abruptly,

"Who *is* this little girl, Sister?"

"I beg your forgiveness, dear lady, I should have presented her in another moment—her name is Genevieve Laglorieuse, madame."

The name was heard with scarcely a perceptible start and change of color, and a tremor quickly controlled by the lady, as she extended her hand to welcome the child.

"She comes from the village of Eyrie, and brings a letter of introduction," continued Sister Angela.

The lady took the letter, and her fingers trembled as she examined the superscription and the seal. Presently she said,

"You are both aware that all sealed packets that come addressed to the late Colonel Malmaison must remain with their seals unbroken until after the reading of his will, when the legal executor appointed by that will, shall have the sole privilege of opening them."

"No—we did not know that," said the simple nun.

"It is so, however," replied the lady.

And then—*ostensibly* as a matter of legal etiquette and propriety—but *really* as a piece of policy to gain time to recover complete composure, and to be unobserved while reading it, Mrs. Malmaison placed the letter, with its seal still unbroken, on the satin-wood stand beside her, and intimated that their interview was at an end, saying,

"You will easily excuse me, dear sister Angela, when I tell you that many nights of unremitted watching have quite exhausted my strength, and make repose a vital necessity."

"But this little girl, madame; from all that I can understand, her arrival here was expected, or at least very much desired by Colonel Malmaison, and I brought her under the impression that she would remain here for the present at

least," said the Sister, looking in surprise and perplexity from the lady to the child.

"And I must beg you, dear Sister Angela, to take charge of her for the present. At such a sorrowful time as this, a little girl, a stranger, could scarcely find our troubled home endurable, or any member of the household sufficiently disembarrassed to attend properly to her comfort. Pray, believe that in recommending her return with you to the asylum, I consult her best welfare," said the lady in a tone so gentle, and with a look so tender and winning, that Sister Angela lost sight of the *real* unkindness, inhospitality, and discourtesy of the act, and at once accepted her explanation as perfectly reasonable and satisfactory.

She arose, and with Genevieve, made her adieus and left.

A few minutes passed, during which the lady, with her fair head raised upon her elbow, listened to the sound of their retreating footsteps, until they passed out of hearing. Still she listened until she heard the outside door open and shut. Then she arose and went to the front window and watched until she saw the white mule led up to the steps of the porch, and the nun get into the saddle, and the child climb to the pillion behind her, and the animal set off in a sober jog-trot down the avenue that let to the bridal-path down the hill.

Then she left the window, returned to her seat on the sofa, took up the letter and broke the seal.

As she read, her cheeks' faint color ebbed and flowed, her bosom heaved, her limbs trembled. More than once she reeled as she sat, and threw her hand up to her forehead as if to compel self-possession. Her senses were on the alert for external sounds, too. Hearing footsteps in the hall below, and dreading lest any one should ascend the stairs and enter her chamber, and discover her in her present state of agitation, she arose and went to the door and

secured it. And then, instead of returning to her sofa, she walked up and down the floor, muttering with pale lips,

"It is as I almost knew at once. This child is the daughter of Eustace Malmaison, and the heiress of all this property. And of all persons on earth, Francois Laglorieuse has brought her home! Can he know of Eustacia's whereabout? At all events a meeting must be prevented between them."

CAAPTER VIII.

THE ABBESS.

Canst thou forget that sad, that solemn day
When victim at yon altar's foot I lay;
Canst thou forget what tears that moment fell,
When warm with youth, I bade the world farewell,
As with cold lips I kissed the sacred vail,
The shrines all trembled and the lamps grew pale?—*Pope.*

Some days had passed. The weather continued severely cold, and the mountain roads were impassable.

The funeral of Colonel Malmaison had taken place. Upon account of the impracticable state of the roads, the solemnity had been but thinly attended.

After the funeral the will had been read in the presence of all the household, and all the guests who returned from the burial ground and remained, from motives of friendship, self-interest, or mere idle curiosity, to hear how the vast Malmaison estate had been devised.

The will was made in sole favor of Ada Malmaison, and her son Austin. The landed estate and personal property was left divided nearly equally between the mother and son during the life of the former; at her death the whole was to descend to the latter. Ada Malmaison and Ernest

Thogmorton were appointed guardians to the child, and executors of the will.

After the reading was completed, the household and the guests separated to talk over the provisions of the will. No mention had been made of the prodigal son, or of the lost daughter of that house. Many who had stayed to that reading, had done so in the hope of again hearing the names of the youth and maiden, whose disappearance ten years before, had ever since been the standing romance and mystery of the valley, and to whose fate they had hoped by means of the will to obtain a clue. But the name of Eustace and Eustacia were not mentioned in the will, nor was their existence alluded to by any member of the family. And in all that concerned their fate the guests went away no wiser than they came. But all departed, wondering afresh over the unknown history of the missing son and daughter, and praising again the beauty, and goodness, and the loveliness of the young and widowed mistress of Mount Storm, fair Ada Malmaison.

The day after the funeral, the Abbess paced up and down her parlor. She was alone, and waiting the return of Brother Peter, the porter, whom she had sent on an errand. Not the first or the second time had she thus sent him, and thus awaited him.

The Abbess has changed in the few days since we first beheld her. Her face, from pale and thin, has become pallid and sharpened. Her manner, from thoughtful, has become gloomy, with alternations of nervousness.

She was alone—she could not bear the look of any of her nuns. She had not slept since that stormy night, and her illness may be by the most simple-minded among them referred back to the events of that evening. She felt that, and chose to avoid observation as much as was consistent with prudence. She paused suddenly in the midst of her

hurried and impatient walk, when she heard the outer door open.

Another moment, and the old porter entered the room.

"Well, Brother Peter? Well?" she exclaimed, hurrying to meet him—but suddenly recollecting and checking herself, she said, more calmly—"Did you succeed in delivering the note, Brother Peter?"

"No, reverend Mother," answered the porter, who was old and gray, and withered enough to be the grandfather of her whom he so addressed—"no, reverend Mother—the good Priest still lies insensible to all around him, nor can they tell whether he will ever speak again!"

A tighter clench of the clasped hands, a firmer pressure of the lips together—no other token of emotion escaped the Abbess.

"And the note, Brother Peter?"

"Here it is, reverend Mother," answered the porter, putting in her hands a small envelope—"the woman at the house wanted me to leave it with her, but I told her it was of no consequence to be left."

"Thank you, Brother Peter—you may go now. Go to the refectory and get something comfortable. I may send for you again this afternoon. We must not neglect a dying Brother, you know. Remember him in your prayers, good Brother Peter. Farewell. *Benedicite, benedicite.*"

Brother Peter retired.

The Abbess dropped upon her knees, and bowed her face, with its streaming tears, upon her hands.

"A lady to see the Mother Superior," announced the Sister portress, ushering a visitor into the parlor—a slender, graceful, gliding woman, dressed in deep mourning.

The Abbess arose hurriedly, turned to escape from the room, and stood—face to face with Ada Malmaison.

A half-suppressed cry escaped her lips, as she sank down into the nearest seat.

The visitor was perfectly calm—she took a chair, drew it up opposite to that of the Abbess, and said,

"It is a long time since we two have met, Lady Abbess!"

"It is! why are you here now?" asked the nun, in a deep, husky tone.

"The event that has just transpired, Mother Agatha, might well explain my visit to you. Well I know how you must have suffered while that soul was passing—"

"Yes! yes! masses have been offered, and are still offered, for the repose of his soul. Prayers and fasts and vigils of those more worthy than I, shall still plead for him! But never would that event you just referred to have brought you here! What was it, then?"

"Your prescience informs you that the death of Colonel Malmaison did not occasion my visit to you—does it not also teach you *what* did bring me here?"

The Abbess was silent.

The eyes of Ada fell upon the note, that lay unheeded on the table. She took it up.

"*This*, then, is what brought me hither. I knew, before seeing this note—for I, too, have some gift in prescience—that you were tempted to break our compact—and tamper with, at least, if not profane all your obligations, religious and secular!"

"This to me?"

"Ay! for what does *this* mean?" she said, reading the superscription—"'To Father Francois Laglorieuse. The Keys, Eyrie!'"

"Open it, and see! Yes! since you have touched it, read it, and see!"

"Are you really in earnest, or is this merely bravado, Lady Abbess?"

"Read! read!"

"Very well, then, I will," said Mrs. Malmaison, opening the small billet, and reading—

"'*Convent of St. Genevieve, January 6th*, 18—.

"'FATHER FRANCOIS:—

"'The little girl, Genevieve, whom you dispatched from Eyrie to Mount Storm, has, for several reasons, too lengthy to here explain, found a temporary home at our house, where we should be glad to see you, when you shall be able to travel.

"'Your Sister in Religion,

"'AGATHA,

"'Mother Superior.'"

She folded the note, and restored it to its envelope—all in silence. At last she raised her eyes furtively, to meet the burning gaze of the Abbess fixed upon her face. Dropping her lids, to avoid that searching look, she asked,

"And is this all?"

"All!"

"And you have given him no clue?"

"None!"

Ada again raised the note to her eyes, and examined the superscription.

"Ay, look!" said the Abbess, "does that tremulous, uncertain tracing resemble the fair, characterless, Italian hand writing you knew of old?"

"No, for it is not the same—not written even by the same person. This is the writing of some aged hand."

"You are right—it was written at my dictation by Mother Monica."

"And *why* was it written?"

"Does not your 'gift of prescience' inform you of that, too?"

"No! for you write to him, withholding the name by which you were known in the world; you send for him to come hither, yet know well that you cannot meet him without sin, nor even make known your existence to him, with-

out a violation of your oath. No, Lady! no gift of prescience of mine, can explain a course so inconsistent," said Ada, in her sweet, pure, silvery tones—her eyes still cast down, for the eyes of the nun were still burning upon her.

"And is there—oh! woman!—in your own breast, no human tenderness, that can by sympathy plead for me? Scarce ten years ago—you by death—I by a doom worse than death—lost all that was most dear to us. And NOW—oh! you know it has been said that—'A living sorrow is infinitely harder to bear than a dead one!'"

"A foolish saying."

"Yes, if taken literally—but we understand it, madame! when the grave has covered our beloved, the worst that we can suffer through them is over—as in the case of you and him you lost. But when they still live and suffer—oh! Ada! you asked me why I sent for him to come here—it was that I might—unseen, look upon him from behind the darkened cloister—unheard, unsuspected—hear the tones of his voice once more. Then he would have gone away unconscious of my having been so near him, unconscious of my very existence—and *I*, oh! Ada! I should have had some drops of the elixir of life to have lived upon! for each shade of expression on that face, each inflection of tone in that voice, each attitude and movement would have wrought itself into my brain and heart, and become a part of my life, and reproduced itself continually through all the days and weeks and months and years, I may still have to bear my life!" said the Abbess, twisting and wringing together her pale fingers.

"What infatuation! Why do you rave in this way to me?"

"Why? I cannot tell! perhaps it is because you have nothing new to learn of me as others might have; because you know my ghastly story as others do not—cannot; and because to you I must speak, or this beating heart *must*

break! You ask me for what purpose I had sent for him to come hither. I have told you. You see it was not to break my promise to you."

"But you *would* have broken your oath. Your oath was —never to *see* Francois Laglorieuse again, and never to make your existence known to him!"

"Never to make my existence known to him! I never contemplated doing so for a moment—but never to *see* him in the way I named—oh! Ada! surely that was not the terms of the promise—or if it was the *literal*, it was not the *implied* meaning! how could it have been? how could I have sworn never to see him, when I might not have been able to *avoid* seeing him, when I might have seen him accidentally?"

"If your mind were not weakened and obscured, you would never deceive yourself, or hope to deceive me, by such poor sophistry. We all know that an oath is binding in its *literal* meaning. And you are bound by yours never to look upon Francois Laglorieuse again."

"Ada! Ada! you can release me from that part of the promise, and you will! Let me see him once more—let me hear him once more—but once more—"

"What madness!"

"But once more, Ada!"

"It is insanity to think of such a thing!"

"Oh! Ada! what harm could the granting of this grace do?"

"What good could possibly come of it?"

"Oh! Ada! my heart is starving!"

"A woman's infatuation about a man she has once loved is proverbial, I know. Yet by experience I know not of it, and by nothing in my own nature can I imagine it, or understand yours. Methinks if I had proved a man a doubly-dyed traitor, I should be able to disengage my soul's life from his, I should shake him off into the fire of evil

whence he sprang—even as St. Paul shook off the serpent."

"Yet I could not, and cannot. I know the evidence was strong, was convincing—and to me it was overwhelming—fatal! Yet! communing with my heart of hearts, I cannot realize or believe it. I have almost distrusted the evidence of my own eyes and ears, as well as of those more impartial, cool and collected, and therefore more trustworthy than myself. And yet all night I fold that little child to my bosom with a comfort—oh! a comfort that I should die in losing. Her sweet brow and eyes plead his cause to me every hour! No evil could spring from a spirit throned upon such a brow, looking from such eyes as hers, and her eyes and brow are his. Oh! Ada!" said the Abbess, in her deep and thrilling tones, "I must see him once again!"

"It cannot be! do you not know that you are not now a responsible, moral agent? Could you dare, with so little self-control as you seem to have now, to trust yourself near him? For, if you could, *I* could not trust you—no! no more than I could trust a maniac, for you would speak to him, if you were sure of losing your soul by it! I know you, Abbess! better than you know yourself! I know of old that impulsive, almost reckless nature of yours! Thank heaven that a 'hedge of thorns' closes you into a straight and narrow path of safety, and do not tear your flesh and shed your blood in trying to scale or break through the inaccessible barrier. Do not send for him again. Do not attempt to see him, or be seen by him. Do not directly, or indirectly, any thing that shall in any way lead him to know, or even to suspect, your existence, or that of—*my son!* for from all this does your sacred oath debar you, which, if it be broken—hear me! so help me, heaven! I give up to the world my share of this secret, and retire from this country, leaving you all to that ruin which you will have pulled down upon your own heads!

"Ada! for the love of Heaven!"

"You think me cruel, and I think you—mad! We are both wrong, perhaps! Come let us reason together—let us understand each other better. In your present state of agitation, you must not think of having him here. And for the present—"

"Oh, Ada, for the present I know as well as you do, it is impossible. For he lies very ill, Ada, and they say it is uncertain whether he will ever rise from that bed."

"Better, far better, for all concerned, if he never did—that is—if such were the will of Heaven."

"He *will* rise! he will not die now! Heaven will not be deaf to the prayers and tears of one who has suffered and expiated so much as I have. He will recover!"

"And if he does?"

"He will journey hither to see this child—she will be sent to him in the common parlor. I shall see him and hear him from behind the grating; myself unseen, my presence unsuspected, as I said!"

"And then?"

"He will depart, unconscious of the fact that I had been so near him—unconscious of the fact of my being in existence."

"And then?"

"But I shall have seen and heard him, and shall have the memory of that interview to live on, through all the weary, dreary years of my future life."

"What else?—will any other blessings have accrued from the visit?"

"Yes! he will have left me his child!"

"'His—child!'" repeated Ada, slowly, looking furtively yet deeply into the face of the nun.

"Yes! his child, Genevieve! Good Heaven! did you imagine I did not know her again?"

"'Not—know—her—again?'" slowly echoed the lady, looking with almost irrepressible amazement, yet with a

searching, stealthy glance at the downcast face of the Abbess.

"Ay! did you think that I should not know her again, though I have not seen her since that day, when an infant, she was borne out from L'Hospital des Belles-Œuvres, in the arms of that man."

While the Abbess spoke, a change had again passed over the face of the lady, and she answered, calmly—

"I am surprised that you should have recognized her. It must have been a very painful recognition."

"Oh! it was! it was! and yet when I gathered her to my bosom that night—oh! the inexpressible comfort that infused itself into my heart. It seemed so good to have her there! What a strange fatality was that which brought her to my door—she was sent to Mount Storm!—the tempest drove her in here. What a recognition! She had a letter directed to Colonel Malmaison. She was sent *really* to *you*, I suppose, Ada."

"Yes—she was sent to me. The letter, as you may judge, was a mere passport to my presence, carefully worded, of course, lest it should fall into other hands. I destroyed it. And now let us leave the subject of the child, and return to that which led to it."

"Not yet. That child told me that she was expected by Colonel Malmaison. That a letter had been received by Francois Laglorieuse, inquiring for her, and desiring her presence—which was the cause of her being brought over. That part of her statement filled me with perplexity. Can you explain it?"

"Certainly—Colonel Malmaison has always been kind and indulgent to me. I naturally felt an interest in that little girl, of whom I had never lost trace, I assure you. At last I told him of an *orphan niece* I had in France—and he wrote the letter of which the child spoke," said the lady, quietly.

"You are kind! you are not stern!" said the Abbess, putting out her hand, and taking and pressing that of her visitor. "You are tender-hearted, and you will do yet more than you have done!—you will release me from that clause of my oath that debars me from seeing Francois again!"

"Never!" exclaimed Ada; and there was a new earnestness in her tone, that impressed the nun with the force of unrelenting fate.—"Never! for it would be a sin! Know that it is impossible, and think no more of it. *You* cannot leave this convent. *He* must not be permitted to approach its sacred walls. He must see and take leave of this child; but I myself will convey her to Eyrie for that purpose. She has been, as you surmised—consigned to my guardianship. Sacrifice your sinful and insane desire to see this double-dyed traitor again—and this child, since her presence is a comfort to you—shall remain here as long as you will. Attempt to evade your oath, and be seen by this man, and you bring destruction upon all!—for then, as Heaven hears me, I will speak what I know!"

A half-suppressed cry—and the hands she had been writhing and twisting together, wrenched apart—and the nun flung herself forward at the feet, and clasped the knees of the lady, and with all the burning eloquence of passionate sorrow, poured forth her prayer for mercy—for pity.

"Rise! rise! Agatha! you are frantic! some one may come!" exclaimed the lady, as nearly alarmed as one of her cold blood, clear head, and steady nerves could be! She might as well have talked to a fire or a flood. At last, slipping away from the clasping arms of the prostrate woman, she went and locked the door, and then returned, and addressed herself to soothing the mourner, even while she steadily refused her prayer.

At length the agony of grief was over—the tempest of sobs and tears had exhausted—without, alas! much relieving their subject. And then the lady arose to leave the

sufferer, saying, as she bade adieu: "You will not send another note or message to the village of Eyrie. *I* will see him upon the subject of Vivia."

CHAPTER IX.

THE PRIEST.

Ah! weary priest, with pale hands pressed
On thy throbbing brow of pain,
Baffled in thy life-long quest,
Over-worn with toiling vain,
How ill thy troubled musings fit
The holy quiet of a breast
With the Dove of Peace at rest
Sweetly brooding over it.—*Whittier.*

No matter how great has been the burden of regret, grief, or anxiety that has oppressed us—and we have had our share of each—we have seldom fallen upon days so evil, when the lovely, the glorious, and even the awful phases of nature, have not ministered to our spirit's need, have not soothed, sustained and consoled us—when the genial, vivifying sunshine, and the blooming flowers, and the fruitful trees and vines have not breathed to us of Divine love; when the lofty mountain and the shadowy forest have not spoken to us of Divine protection, and when even the terrific storm has not thundered the presence of Divine power. Therefore have we always worshiped nature only less than nature's God.

No matter how humble the house, how small the chamber, and how low the roof that sheltered us, if its windows did but look out upon the never-wearying, ever beautiful face of our common mother, that only face whose infinite variety "age cannot wither, nor custom stale."

No tenement could be much humbler or more commonplace in its appearance and character, than the little village inn at Eyrie. And no tenement could be placed in the midst of more sublime and beautiful scenery. It was built when the road was first opened, and the stage-road laid off across the mountains, as a place to refresh the passengers, and rest or change the horses. The range of mountains through which this route passed, was, from their being bristled all over from base to summit with quill-like pine and cedar trees, called the Porcupines. Through the most "feasible" gorge of the Porcupines the turnpike was laid out, and in the most accessible spot the inn was erected. It was a very plain, double-fronted, two-storied house, built of rough hewn rock, and fronting southeast, while behind it arose a gigantic ridge of rocks, quilled over with sharp looking evergreens and mountain thorns, and thence called the Porcupine's Rock. This towering pile of rocks and pines and cedars, effectually protected the building from the fierce northwest winds of winter, and from the burning afternoon sun of summer. While between the back of the building and the foot of the mountain, there was ground enough for a spacious yard, and all the out-buildings necessary for a country inn.

Before the house grew two great, old gnarled and twisted elm-trees, that in the forenoon shaded the upper and lower piazzas that ran along the front of the house. At the southwest corner of the house, from a post and an extension beam, looking dismally like a gallows, hung the tavern sign, end a pair of crossed keys.

Around every country tavern, if it only stands long enough, will gather in course of time a hamlet. Such a hamlet collected around the Keys. First, on the same side of the street, just below the sign, was opened a country store that supplied the neighboring district with every necessary in the grocery, dry goods, hardware, druggist, shoe

maker, fancy and confectionery line. Then, on the same side, just *above* the hotel, where a mountain torrent, now bridged over, dashed across the road, came a miller. Then, as a steep hill at either extremity rather shortened the street, the new-comers, instead of extending their buildings on the same side with the hotel, began to erect tenements on the opposite side, which was soon taken up by a blacksmith's shop, built just across the street from the country store—a lawyer's office and dwelling house all in one, opposite the hotel, a doctor's home and office opposite the mill—and, lastly, a shoemaker's shop, and a carpenter's shop opposite the mill-stream. Behind, as a sort of suburb, were the small cabins of wood-cutters, farm-laborers, and other very poor country people, of that forlorn, destitute, and degraded class, called by the negroes, poor "White Herrings."

Thus, you perceive that the village of Eyrie, though in that wild and sparsely settled neighborhood enjoying quite a local celebrity, was, in fact, only a small mountain hamlet built along one street, and consisting of less than a half-dozen shops, offices, and dwelling houses, collected around its first nucleus, the—hotel; and outside of them a few scattered huts seeming to play at hide-and-seek among the rocks and ravines of the mountain-pass.

To return to the inn. In the second-floor chamber, at the southeast corner of the house, lay a sick man—that Father Francis of whom Genevieve spoke. He had now been there long and weary days. Clean, but otherwise most comfortless were the bare walls, the uncarpeted floor, the fireless hearth, and the uncurtained windows of this room. Being a corner room, it rejoiced in the light of four windows, two in front, and two at the end—one being on each side of the fireplace. These windows let in the weak, red rays of the winter's sun, and half a sphere of snow-covered mountain and valley scenery. The scanty furniture of this

room consisted of a tall, spectral looking, four-post bedstead, an oaken chest of drawers, a wash-stand, and two leather-covered chairs—all of which were so old-fashioned, that they might really have come over in one of Raleigh's ships. The bed was, however, as usual in those country houses, the most comfortable article in the chamber, abundantly filled, well supplied with soft, full pillows, domestic linen, thick homespun blankets, homemade yarn counterpanes, and elaborately pieced quilts. The bedstead was placed with its head against the partition wall next the passage, and its foot toward the fireplace and the end windows. And though the wind whistled around from the north, and shook and rattled the window sashes, and flurried back again only to gather force to whistle around from the west, and play the same trick—and though Father Francis's breath congealed in a crystalline wreath of frost within three inches of his nose upon the bed quilt, yet he might have kept up enough of vital heat for healthful action, if only he would have economized the same by lying still and keeping covered. And had his mind been disengaged, he might have found occupation, amusement, and inspiration enough in watching through the front windows the magnificent landscape spread out before him—the endless prospect of mountain and valley, forest and river, all frozen and covered with snow—forming an interminable ocean of snow, as it rose and fell in great waves of ridge and dell, and rolled, purer, bluer, fainter in color and in tracery, until it gradually faded away in the extreme distance, and was lost under the southern horizon. But Father Francis cared for none of these things now, and ever and anon he tossed about in restlessness, and threw the cover from his chest and shoulders, until chilled almost into torpor, he gathered them around him again. There was no bell-rope or hand-bell in the room—probably none in the whole establishment, but by his bedside stood a stick that answered the same pur-

pose. In his restless changing of position, his eyes happened to light upon this substitute, and divining its use, he seized it and thumped a peremptory summons upon the floor. He was promptly answered by the appearance of the landlady in the room.

She went up to the side of the bed, and said,

"Father Francis, there is a lady down-stairs—Mrs. Malmaison, of Mount Storm. She wishes to see you. Are you able to have visitors?"

"Yes—yes—show the lady up directly!" exclaimed the invalid.

The landlady left the room, and soon returned, ushering in the visitor, and immediately retired, closing the door behind her.

"Fair and full of blessing as the Angel of the Annunciation, Ada! Oh! how strange that such words should spring to my lips on this, the first meeting for so many years, Ada! But for many days before I was taken sick, you were in my mind, and almost the first thought of my sentient convalescence, was—Ada!" said the sick man, extending his hand to his visitor.

The lady took that hand and pressed it, and then, in the calm and deliberate manner usual to her, she drew a chair and sat down by his bedside.

"Yes, it is long, very long, nearly ten years since we last met, Father Francis!" she said.

"I thought never to have seen your face again, Ada!"

"Until the commencement of your voyage and journey hither!"

"Until the commencement of my travels hither! Yes! Well, Ada! I came only to bring that dear child over—then to return to my parish, and wear out my life among my poor people."

"You came, dear Father Francis, only to bring that child over. I am glad you came and brought her. Only

please tell me—I ask from the deepest interest in that child's welfare—what encouragement had you to bring her hither, Father Francis?"

"A letter from Colonel Malmaison, addressed to the American Consul at Havre, and forwarded to me. The letter had followed me from station to station over France, and half over Ireland before it reached me at Fermanagh. I lost no time and spared no expense in obeying the wishes of Colonel Malmaison, as set forth in the letter, and bringing Genevieve over to this country. And now, dear lady, tell me of the child—"

"She is well. She is now at the Convent of the Visitation."

"I know that—but her future prospects?"

"Alas! in all that relates to her future, you will have to trust to *me*. Colonel Malmaison, hearing nothing of his eldest son, or that son's only child, naturally enough concluded them to be no more, and made his will accordingly, leaving the bulk of his property to the only child of his *second* son—my child, Austin! I am sorry for all this—truly sorry—especially as nothing can be legally done until Austin attains his majority."

The lady ceased speaking. The countenance of the priest betrayed the deepest grief and disappointment. The lady observed this expression, and hastened to say—

"Therefore you will please to confide to me the future welfare of that child; and her fortune shall, believe me, be just the same as if she were a daughter of my own. If you should feel now, or at any future time, any doubt about it, you can test my sincerity."

"Lady, humility is a beautiful virtue, but yours is always doing you wrong. 'Doubt' *you*, Ada!—wish to 'test' *your* sincerity! Why that were little short of blasphemy! Do but assume the care of this child, and all my anxiety for her will be soothed to rest."

"Then be at rest—I will care for the child as for my own."

"Thank you! I thank you with the whole strength and warmth of my heart—and if there were any stronger words than—God forever bless you, Ada—to express my gratitude—they should be yours—God love and bless you, Ada!"

Her head was averted, her eyes cast down; if there was one thing that woman could not face, it was the fervent, earnest "God bless you," that somehow she often managed to evoke from others' lips, yet which always seemed inverted to "God *judge* you," before it reached her ears. Her face was averted, her eyes cast down, the priest could not see the expression of her countenance, and even if he could have done so, that fair, impassable mask would have revealed nothing. As it was, he attributed her bearing to meekness, to humility, for in very truth she had the look of a fair, sensitive woman, painfully abashed at her own praises.

"And now, dear and excellent lady, may I trouble that serene soul of yours with one painful subject—Eustacia! Eustacia! where is she? What is her fate?"

Ada shook her head.

"In the last ten years I have wandered over half the globe in search of her—'I cannot make her dead.' Oh! tell me, you were her friend and confidante—do you know nothing—?"

Again Ada shook her head.

"Speak! have you *heard* nothing?—no reports?"

Once more Ada shook her head most mournfully—her silence was more expressive than words.

"Yet speak! oh! speak! tell me! do you surmise nothing? Speak, Ada! I can bear any thing for a relief from this long and deathlike nothingness, in all that relates to her fate."

"Well! I will speak! In all your searches after that lost woman, did you ever think of the opera companies?"

"Good Heaven!"

"I repeat that I know nothing—and that I have heard nothing. Yet, on a visit to Baltimore, some years since, I was induced to go to the opera, to hear a celebrated singer —Signora Vozzia, of whom you have heard. Well! I recognized, or thought I recognized—and with what painful astonishment you may judge—Eustacia! It was the last appearance of the popular artiste, and when, at the end of the performance, she was summoned by acclamation before the curtain, and in a few words made her acknowledgments for the favor of the public, I could not be mistaken—no one could ever mistake her voice in speaking. I knew that, notwithstanding the strangeness, the almost impossibility of the situation—I looked upon Eustacia—Eustacia, in the vainglorious shimmer of diamonds and white satin, and amid all the profane surroundings of theatrical life!"

"And you sought to reclaim her?—yes! undoubtedly, you did—it were superfluous to ask it. Well! and then? and then?"

"You may be sure I lost no time in seeking her; but she had left the theatre before my messenger reached the green-room. I then followed her to her lodging, and sent up my name, but received for an answer that the Signora had retired. In the morning I went again to her hotel, but she had left the city in the early three o'clock coach, on her way to Philadelphia. I still followed, but never overtook her, for when I reached New York, she had sailed for Havre. Her withdrawal had all the features of a flight. Or at least I thought so. At a venture I addressed a letter to her at Paris. Whether it ever reached her, I have no means of knowing—for from the time of her leaving Havre for Paris, I have lost trace of her."

"Well? well?"

"I returned home. Having no longer the present evidence of my senses before me, I was sufficiently in doubt about the reality of my former convictions as to the identity of Eustacia with the popular singer, to keep silence on the subject, until I should be able to substantiate my assertions, and, for the time, to content myself with watching the musical intelligence in the newspapers, and sending off letters at a venture, that never brought any response."

"Well? dear lady, well?"

"That is all. I never again saw her name in any paper that came to us—and never received an answer to any letter that I addressed to her. And still I felt forced to maintain a strict silence on the painful subject, and still from time to time I have pursued my investigations."

The priest groaned deeply, and covered his face with his hands.

The lady drew nearer to him, and her voice was silvery, sweet and persuasive, as she murmured,

"Father Francis—forget that evil woman. It is a severe sentence for me, who was once her friend, to utter, but the good must not wreck themselves upon the evil—and reflect, that most unworthy of regret or grief is she whose sin darkened all your earthly life. And remember, that in your deepest despair, when you turned from the world to God, how Heaven restored the heart that earth had broken. Remember! and by a cheerful fortitude, be worthy, dear father, of the service to which you are vowed."

"Young monitress! I *do* remember, and thank you for recalling me to duty. But, oh, Ada! Ada! that woman! that woman! I said just now, that I could not 'make her dead;'—as she rises before me now, in imagination—I cannot 'make her *false*.'"

"Ah, sir! would that I could truly encourage you in that view! but, you know too well the condemning evidence. And you know also it is but the dotage of sorrowful memory

that shows her to you in that falsely-fair light. Grieve no longer, sir; dismiss that foredoomed daughter of perdition from your mind, or only remember to pray for her, if indeed you think her a proper subject of prayer."

"I may not do so. No, though the world—may the Lord pardon me, for I was about to say—though *heaven* reject her, yet will not I. Paris—you said it was at Paris that you had last heard of her?"

"Of the opera singer that I fully believed to be her."

"Well, as soon as I am able to rise from this couch, I set out immediately for Paris. The clue is a slight one, but I have often followed slighter still. Shall I trouble you, dear lady, to-morrow, or the next day, or at your earliest convenience, to send Genevieve hither, that I may take leave of her. It will save me a day."

"I myself will bring her here to-morrow."

"Many thanks, dear Ada. May Heaven reward you!"

Again the lady's face was bowed, seemingly in meek acceptance of the blessings—really in shrinking avoidance of the coals of fire thus heaped upon her head.

She was about to speak again, when the little hostess flitted in to say that Dr. Thogmorton was coming up.

And Mrs. Malmaison arose and took her leave, and departed.

And the next morning, true to her promise, notwithstanding the dreadful state of the mountain roads, Mrs. Malmaison drove from Mount Storm to the Convent, took up the little Genevieve, and carried her to take leave of her guardian the priest. Ada chose to be present during the whole of the interview, which lasted from the middle of the forenoon, until the low, descending sun threw the shadow of the great Porcupine over the house, and warned the priest to give his ward the parting benediction. After which they departed. Mrs. Malmasion took her young protege back to the Convent, and gave her up to Mother Agatha, and then

returned to Mount Storm, which she had scarcely time to reach before the dark, cold, winter night fell over the scene.

Two days from this, the priest, though still very feeble, and unfit for travel, set out by easy stages on his return to Baltimore, in order to be in time to embark in an outward bound clipper for Havre. Ada Malmaison had furnished the funds for his traveling expenses.

CHAPTER X.

THEODORA.

We will call her
Theodora,
Child of God.—*Edith May.*

"BLESSED are the dead that die in the Lord, for they rest from their labors, and their works do follow them. In peace depart then, oh! Christian soul, out of this world, in the name of God the Father Almighty, who created thee; in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, who suffered for thee on the cross; in the name of the Holy Ghost, whose graces were infused into thee. Come to her assistance, all ye saints of God. Meet her, all ye angels of of God; and present her now before her Lord." The words were sweetly and fervently breathed by Sister Angela. They were a part of the beautiful ritual for a passing soul. They were breathed forth for an aged and dying woman, who had no other mortal comforter than the fair and fragile girl who knelt and prayed by her bedside. The departing pilgrim had lost all power of motion or of speech; her lips could no longer move in response to the prayer. She was dying fast though calmly, her eyes were fixed and filmed,

but their gaze was settled upon the face of the sweet saint, kneeling before her, who, as she prayed, still looked hope and comfort and courage into those fast darkening orbs. It seemed so good to have that young and holy maiden there, so full of faith and hope and love that she was able to transfuse them into that fainting soul.

"May Jesus Christ receive her!"

"Amen."

This last response was made in a low, half-suffocated voice, by a child that had all this time been kneeling by the opposite side of the bed. Then both arose.

"She is gone," said Sister Angela, reverently closing the eyes from which the last light had fled, and composing the limbs that were now cold in death. Then she smoothed the coverlet. The child on the other side timidly assisted, and then stood waiting. She was not crying, not sobbing—but she stood so motionless, so silent, so hopeless, with such a still, patient, heart-broken look upon her little face, down which the great tears were slowly rolling, that it almost broke poor Angela's own heart to look at her. She went around and sat down, and took the child in her lap, and embraced her tenderly, saying, as she laid the grief-bowed young head upon her loving bosom,

"Theodora, remember, dear, that she who an hour ago was suffering here all the ills of poverty, sickness, and old age together, and who bore them so meekly and so bravely, is now a glorious saint in Heaven. And try to realize, I mean, try to feel that it really is so, and think that if anything could trouble her in her heavenly home, it would be to know that you were grieving here. You are not a desolate orphan, my dear one, for, while we both live, I am your earthly mother. And besides me, you have a mother in Heaven. And above all, and yet nearer than all, you have a Father in Heaven. Little one, I am almost as poor as was the Master that I love and follow; yet not quite, for

He had not where to lay His blessed head, while the humblest of His servants have all things really needful at least. And you, Theodora, shall share my home and my heart. And now, dear one, do you know what we have to do? Can you be courageous, little one? But you shall do as you please. Listen! As there is no one in the house, we must get help from the Convent. That is half a mile off. It is very dark, but one or both of us must go. It is best that I should go, and go alone, and that you should remain here until my return. Are you afraid to stay here alone till I come? If so, I will shut up the house and take you with me. Answer, Theodora, are you afraid?"

"May be I might be, dear Sister, but still I would rather stay than leave *her* alone, you know," answered the little girl, meekly.

The blending of truth, affection and humility in her answer, touched the sympathy of the gentle nun.

"I wish that some better plan were possible," she said.

"I will stay, dear Sister. I will kneel and pray while you are gone. And then I shall not feel lonesome or frightened."

"May the angels guard you, good child. Now fasten the door after me, and keep it so until you hear my voice at the door again," said the Sister, as she donned her hood and mantle, and passed out into the wintry night.

In less than an hour, the assistance she went for was obtained, and she returned to the house accompanied by two other nuns, who remained through the night and through the next day until the humble funeral was over. And then Sister Angela led the orphan from the desolate home to the Convent. And it was a very desolate house indeed that they had left. An old dilapidated gray stone house, consisting of only two rooms and an attic, and very poorly furnished also—so poorly, that all it contained being sold,

brought but a few dollars, which were appropriated to the payment of the few small debts owed by the late tenant.

The very day of Theodora's arrival, Sister Angela sought an interview with the Superior. She found the Abbess in the green parlor already described. Sitting down, she said,

"I have come to you, Mother, about this child, Theodora. She has at present no home. Can she remain here?"

"Most certainly she must stay here until farther provided for—although the house is very full and the receipts from the Academy are scarcely adequate to the support of the Institution."

"I know it," said Angela, meekly, "I know it, yet 'the cattle upon a thousand hills, is the Lord's,' and he who fed the seven thousand with the five loaves and two small fishes, will not suffer us to want."

"But this child has kindred who are well able to take charge of her. I think I have heard a rumor that the grandmother, who is just dead, was a lady of fortune and family—and that she had very wealthy relatives, even a daughter and son-in-law whom she left in anger, and from whom she remained away in pride."

Dear Mother Agatha, you have been here so short a time, and you are so averse to gossip, that you know very little of the neighborhood. Will you permit me to tell you that story, as I happen to know it? And to do it, I will be obliged to speak of myself."

"Say on, dear Angela. Your words will be all the more interesting to me, if they relate to yourself, for, dear child, I have often wished to know the circumstances that led to your taking the vail."

"I will make my account as short as possible, dear Mother. My own sainted mother was called to Heaven when I was but four years old, yet I remember her angel-face well.

Father Bernard, our aged confessor, taught me that she had become my guardian angel, and watched over her child constantly, and was near her always. Thus I always had the feeling that my mother was with me; and if ever I was tempted into any childish sins, the thought that the angel-mother watching over me would be grieved by my fault, withheld me. If any thing pained or grieved me, the thought that my sainted mother would be distressed by my tears, restrained me from weeping and complaint. Thus, you see, the love of my dear mother became a religion to me, before I could understand a higher and holier religion. And every night I would fall asleep smiling, with my hands folded on my bosom, as in prayer, and with the name of my mother on my lips. I tell you this because it will enable you to understand the bitter grief—perhaps I ought to say the morbid and unreasonable grief—with which I learned from the old servants, who were fond of me, that my father, General Garland, was going to bring me home a 'new mother.' A 'new mother'—the very words seemed to me to be profane—and it was not only with grief, but with amazement, and a sort of blank horror, that I met the gay, showy, laughing girl of eighteen, that was introduced to me as my new mother. I fear I spoiled the wedding-day, but without intending it. I wept passionately, refusing to be comforted—they said, and thought, no doubt, that I wept with *anger*, when I only wept with *grief*—with grief—for, as it seemed to me *then*, not only was my dear mother's memory desecrated, but I instinctively and deeply felt that I had lost my father. And that was true—I *had* lost him. Let me be just to my step-mother—she was a bright, gay, joyous creature, full of vivacity, and thus had a very enlivening influence upon a dull, weary man like my father, and so possessed almost unbounded power over him. She was not only without a portion herself, but she had a widowed mother and a younger sister in such straightened

circumstances, that soon after her marriage their affairs arrived at such a crisis, that they were under the necessity of coming to live at my father's house. Mrs. Carlisle, my step-mother's parent, I must say, was very kind to me, indeed. So was Miss Carlisle, for the short time she was with us, but soon after her arrival she was married to Mr. Shelley, a young merchant of Baltimore, and accompanied her husband to that city. My step-mother at first seemed disposed to be very fond of me; but I felt, without understanding it, that there was no depth or earnestness in her show of affection. I felt, besides, as if it were a sort of treason to my own dear mother, to call that laughing romp by that sacred name. So I did not return her caresses or call her mamma, and I wept passionately when they wished to make me do either. They naturally enough thought it was ill-temper, when indeed it was only grief, and perhaps mistaken fidelity to my own dear mother. However that might be, Mrs. Garland, though very kind to everybody else, seeing that I could not return her kisses, took a dislike to me. My father also misunderstood me, said that I was a perverse, spoiled child, and must be sent to school, to learn better manners. And as I was eight years old, I was placed at this very Institution.—Mrs. Carlisle, who was always kind to me, interceded for me, and would have had it otherwise; but my father was not to be turned from his purpose, at least by any other than his wife, and she would not interfere. Therefore I was sent here. And here I lived very happily until I was sixteen years old. Then I was recalled home. In the mean time some change had taken place. My father had other children, and, besides that, was burdened with several of his wife's needy relations —first, there was old Mrs. Carlisle, her mother, and then there was her widowed sister, Mrs. Shelley, whose husband had failed and died, leaving her with two children, and without any support. They all found a home in my father's

house. But my father still doted on his wife, and every thing she did was good in his sight. When I returned home, I found myself not only a supernumerary but an additional burden. I had been happy in the Convent. The service of Christ in suffering humanity was a vocation that irresistibly attracted me. I mentioned my wish to consecrate my poor faculties to such a life. I met no opposition except from Mrs. Carlisle, who erroneously imagined the step to be a sacrifice. I was encouraged by my father, and—the step was taken. I left the Convent for the first time after taking the vail, to attend my father during the long illness that terminated in his death."

Angela paused here to wipe away the tears that forced their way, and the Abbess inquired in a low voice,

"What were all those women that he was supporting doing, while you had the sole charge of nursing him?"

"Mrs. Carlisle was giving me what assistance she could. Mrs. Shelley was taking care of her eldest girl, who died about the time my dear father did."

"And your father's wife?"

"Was keeping house for the large family. I must hasten now to conclude this account. After these two deaths, of my dear father and the little girl, I returned to the Convent and to my labors among the poor. I have only rumor now for what happened after I left, for though I loved my half-sisters, especially Rose the eldest, very much, yet I seldom visited them, and they never came to see me. With the solitary exception of a small bequest to this institution, given upon my account, my father had left the whole of his property unconditionally to my step-mother, trusting confidently in her attachment to their children to secure those children's future welfare, at least as far as money and her efforts could secure it. But look what resulted. Mrs. Garland, a handsome woman, but little over thirty, thought proper to marry again. And if she probably wedded the

first time for money and position, and attained them, surely she wedded the second time only for love, for Doctor Thogmorton, her second husband, has nothing but his profession, which, you may judge, is not very lucrative in a neighborhood like this. In bestowing her hand, she made no reservation of any part of her property, either for herself or her children."

"A piece of deplorable carelessness, or else more culpable recklessness, as far as those children are concerned," said the Abbess.

Angela made no comment, but went on.

"This second marriage has not turned out very happily for all parties. Doctor Thogmorton seemed to consider his wife's children to have some sort of right to shelter, and food, and clothing, especially as the house, plantation, negroes, and bank-stock, of which he had become possessed by his marriage with their mother, had come to *her* through their father; but this toleration did not in any wise extend to his wife's mother, sister, and niece, who were still living there, whom he certainly considered very superfluous members of the family—and he soon contrived to make them feel themselves interlopers. Mrs. Carlisle, perhaps, he might have endured, upon account of her great age, but Mrs. Shelley and little Theodora, he would not tolerate at all. No one, however, thought that he would go so far as to request Mrs. Shelley to provide herself with another home. But he did. Mrs. Carlisle was a proud woman, not in the sinful and offensive sense of the word, but she was what is called high-toned—she would not remain in a house from which her unhappy younger daughter had been requested to retire. She had a little money, but very little. So she rented—at a merely nominal rent—that dilapidated building on Basil Wildman's place, and with the poor remnants of unsaleable furniture that she had brought to Gray Rock, she moved into the old house, and made there such a home

as she could for her daughter and grandchild. What a train of calamities! Immediately after moving into that old wind-riven building, Mrs. Shelley, always delicate, and much more so since her misfortunes, took cold, and died within two weeks. The family at Gray Rock did not hear of her sickness until a few days before her death. Then Mrs. Garland, I should say Mrs. Thogmorton, came over, bringing a carriage full of comforts; but the old lady would receive none of them. After the death of Mrs. Shelley, Doctor Thogmorton, with a late repentence, came over and besought his mother-in-law to return. But—you will understand it—it was not pride nor anger—her heart was broken—she refused, and begged him to relieve her of his painful presence. He did so; but returned, accompanied by his wife, the next day. And to his renewed entreaties she joined tears and prayers. But, as I said, the poor old lady's heart was broken, and perhaps her mind was slightly deranged. She refused to go back with them, and besought them, as the only thing left them now to do for her comfort, to go away and leave her alone. They went to consider what could be done to induce her to change her purpose. The neighborhood severely censured the doctor, and his practice fell off. He could not, however, do any thing for the old lady then. He talked of applying to the Court for authority to take her as an imbecile under his own protection. But death arrested that purpose. Last Friday night while I was repeating my Office, little Theodora came running to me, telling me that her grandmother had been suddenly taken very ill. I hastened to her assistance; and when I got to her bedside, found her dying. It was not possible to find a messenger that time of night to go ten miles through the dreadful roads to Gray Rock, to inform her daughter of her extremity. Besides, she was going very fast, and I dared not leave her. I stayed with her to the last; and in the morning sent off a man with the intel-

ligence of her death to Gray Rock. The news threw Mrs Thogmorton into a brain fever. Thus, you see, it happened that the poor old lady died and was buried without the presence of her only living daughter. Doctor Thogmorton feels very dreadfully about the sorrowful affair, and his own disgraceful share in it. I expect that he will endeavor to atone by taking charge of Theodora. But at present he cannot leave the bedside of his wife, who is lying very ill."

"In the mean time, Theodora must remain here," said the Abbess.

The Orphan Asylum dependant upon the Convent was full, and even crowded, as the Abbess had said. There was not a spare cot in the dormitory, a vacant seat in the school-room, or an empty chair at the table for another child.

Nevertheless, by day a place was made in the school-room for the latest orphan, and a chair was placed for her at the Sister's board, and at night she shared the cell of Sister Angela.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CHAMPION.

Valiant Helen is as fire—
Seeking danger, braving ire.—*Anon.*

THEODORA had scarcely a friend in the establishment except Sister Angela. Not that any one was unkind to the newly bereaved orphan; but that she herself was one of those silent, shy, sensitive children, who never venture to make advances toward the acquaintance or friendship of others, and who often even shrink with fear or dislike from advances rudely or coarsely made by others. And now over her constitutional shyness had fallen the dark shadow of a heavy sorrow, doubly deepening her natural reserve.

Her first introduction into the school-room, was a time of serious trial to a grieved and sensitive heart like hers. She was brought in during the time of recess by the Mother Superior, who chose that hour as the one most likely to make the little alien acquainted with her school-mates, and who in presenting her, said—

"Little girls, here is a young companion that I bring you. Her name is Theodora Shelley. I hope you will love her very much, for she is very sorrowful;" and so leaving her the Abbess retired.

But the lady had not calculated on the thoughtless, worrying, hunting instinct of the school-children, or on the shrinking nature of the poor little "stricken deer," that she had cast among them. As the last arrival, Theodora immediately found herself an object of curiosity and remark to these secluded children, whose temporary separation from the rest of the world, made them many degrees more inquisitive and observing than the children of the villages, or of the day schools. Feeling, without understanding this, little Theodora drew more and more away from notice. And this made affairs much worse for the poor child. Her morbid sensitiveness became a matter of amusement to her thoughtless little companions. A few of the most mischievous among them gathered around her, with teasing questions and remarks, examining and criticising her poor clothing, and using many other ingenious methods of annoyance, until the child, wounded and suffering in spirit, and shrinking into herself, was almost on the verge of tears.

"Oh! if she ain't agoing to cry," jeered one tall, coarse-looking girl, that they called Joanna.

"See! see! she's tuning up her pipes now! watch how she does it," said another.

"Why, she pipes her *eyes!*"

"*Don't* she look pretty, though?" inquired another girl, of an ironical turn of mind, whom they called Liddy.

"Look at her! what is she trying to hide behind?" asked Joanna, mockingly, as the little creature shrunk and crouched.

"She's trying to hide behind *herself*, I reckon?" mocked Liddy.

"Oh! she's going to swallow her head now, like a land terrapin!" shouted Joanna, as the poor child dropped her forehead, and covered her face with both hands.

"She's got such a pretty face, she ought to hide it," observed Miss Irony.

"So she ought."

"I wonder if she's crying?"

"Let's see," said the leader, Joanna.

And then the rude, thoughtless girls, ignorant, most likely, of the real pain they were inflicting, and instigated by that school-girl instinct of hunting, worrying, and tormenting any thing that fled or shrank from them, gathered around her and commenced pulling away her hands, peeping into her face, mocking her, and there is no telling to what extremity they might not have gone, if in the midst of her distress, a champion had not arisen.

A little wiry-limbed, dark-browed, scowling, angry, impetuous witch, dashed into the midst of the group—felled Joanna down on one side, and Liddy on the other, scattered the remaining three, and planted herself in front of Theodora, before any one had recovered their surprise, or found tongue enough to object. And then still shielding Theodora with her own valiant little person, she read her own Riot Act after her own fashion to the surprised and stupefied girls, who had picked themselves up from where she had thrown them, but had not as yet collected senses enough to calculate whether they should close upon and attack such a dangerous antagonist, or take the safer course of reporting her to "Sister."

"Now, for the future, you let Theodora alone! Ain't you ashamed of yourselves, you little—"

She was about to say, miserable beggars; but in the rush of anger she remembered justice and compassion, and felt that the poor, ignorant children were not to be reproached with their misfortunes, so she continued:

"Oh, it is not your fault what you are! but if you *wa'n't* that, wouldn't I give it to you, that's all! Listen here, you! you know very well, if I were to tell Sister how you have been teazing, and worrying, and dragging, and pulling, and making fun of poor Theodora, Sister would put you all under penance till you had come to the sense of your sins. And if you don't go right off to the other end of the room, and leave me alone here with Theodora, I'll walk straight in to Sister, and bring her right straight here to see Theodora weeping, and I'll tell her all about it right before your faces! I will, as true as I'm a trump!"

This threat was, in some degree, effectual, The most conscience-stricken among the delinquents slunk away, covering their inglorious retreat by such mutterings as "She'd better," and "I'll tell Sister *myself*, if it comes to *that*," etc. Then turning to her protege, the little champion said,

"Don't you mind them! They don't know any better! La! you know they are poor white peoples' children, what can you expect? Why, dear me, it's their nature! Why, even when I turned my pretty white bantam pullet into the barnyard among the common poultry, you have no idea how the chickens pecked at her. It's the same way all over the world, I reckon. But don't you mind *them!* I'm your friend! And if Miss Joan or Miss Liddy trouble you again, just call on me! I'll give them a lesson! Why don't you look up at me?—I do believe the child is a fool, after all," she said to herself, as Theodora, who had shrunk from her impetuous friend with only less of dread than she

had from her foes, now turned up a pair of the shyest, sweetest, softest brown eyes that ever were seen.

"Why are you afraid of me?"

"I don't know!" softly whispered the child.

"Ha, ha, ha!" burst in derisive laughter from the girls, who heard this reply.

But the champion made a step forward in a threatening attitude, the laugh quavered into silence, and she returned and put her arms caressingly, protectingly, around the neck of Theodora.

"What's the matter now? Are you afraid of me?"

"Ye-es," whispered the child, more lowly than before.

"Why, you don't think I'll bite you, do you?" inquired the champion, laughing.

"No!" said Theodora, very softly.

"No, to be sure not! Why, I wouldn't hurt you, or even hurt your feelings, for the whole world!"

"Oh, hurting feelings hurts worse than all!" ventured the child, stealing a glance at her friend's face.

"Oh, does it? I didn't know, because nobody ever hurt my feelings, and I r-a-t-h-e-r think that they had better not try!"

"Why, what would you do to them?" shily questioned Theodora.

"*They'd* find out!" said the champion, mysteriously; "I don't want to frighten *you* again, by telling you how! But what makes you such a little coward? I thought you were a brave girl, and I would have some comfort in you. I thought you were full of spunk! Sister Angela said you had a great deal of—let's see, what did she call it—courage and fortitude.

"She said that you stayed all alone in the old house, and watched by the side of your poor grandmother when she was lying dead."

"Yes," answered Theodora, her soft eyes filling at this

reference to the departed. "Yes, but you know the holy angels were there, and so I was not afraid."

"Ha! ha! ha! Oh! hear her!" laughed the other girls.

A menacing demonstration on the part of the champion silenced them.

"The holy angels were there, and so you were not afraid? Humph! Well, do you know, I should have been as much afraid of *them* as any thing else? Uh! you make me shiver! Wh, I'm more struck with fear at the thought of seeing an unearthly being than any thing in the world! I'd rather meet a roaring lion, or an angry schoolmistress, or Sister Shining Skylights herself, than the ghost of a saint or a live angel! Ur-r-r-r-r! I tell you that at the very sight of an angel I should fall flat upon my face and yowl! I know I should! and I'm no coward neither! but if one of *them* was to appear to me all alone in a dark house, it would be the death of me."

"The glorious angels know that! they know that our eyes cannot look upon them. Why, you know, we hear it read in the Lives of the Saints that even the holiest of the saints also fell flat upon their faces sometimes before the blazing splendor of some glorious angel that suddenly appeared to them. So the good angels that love and guard small children do not show themselves, you know."

"No! I don't know any thing about them! but I know if *I* had been in that lonesome old house in the dead of night alone with a corpse, and thought that the angels were near me, I should have taken to my heels and never stopped till I had left the old house far behind, and got into company that I *did* know something about! Well! what I'm going to say is *this:* If you get into any more trouble, such as you got into this morning, when the angels ain't on hand, you know, just call on a little sinner—that's me! I'm always on hand when innocence is to be defended, and wickedness defeated, and justice done. And my name is

Helen Wildman! that vulgar folks call Nelly and Nell Gwin and Mad Nell, and sometimes Nell Fire! Now mind! don't you make a mistake in that last pet name, and begin it with an H; you know, if you do—'angels and ministers of grace defend you'—and that's a prayer I didn't learn out of a missal!"

"No, it ain't in my prayer-book, but it is very pretty—where *did* you learn it?"

"Out of a wicked play-book that I had to read in the barn, because Blaise swore at me for having it—because he said it wasn't a book for a little girl, no way he could fix it. I didn't mind his swearing any more than his singing or whistling, but he just happened to be stronger than I was, and he took the book away from me. So when I got it again I hid it, and read it in the barn, and in the cow-shed, and the hen-house, and in the corn-loft; and the way I have to run and hunt and hide with that book this winter weather, is a caution! Then I ran away and went to Mount Storm, where there is a big house warm all over, and where nobody cared what I read."

"But would you read what you were told not to?" asked the child, cautiously.

"La! yes! I don't belong to any body, you know! *I'm* an orphan, too—only I know how to take care of myself, like the rabbits. And as to doing what I am told not to do—*why I always* do that—*sure* to do it. And when I got hold of the book again, I hunted from one end to the other to find out the wickedness that Blaise kept such a fuss about, because I was determined to know all about it. And, oh! I tell you it was wicked—no doubt about it—it made me shiver. There was a horrid lady that killed a good old king. And an awful hunchback that killed two innocent little princes. And two hateful women that turned their poor old father out in a storm to die! Oh, it was wicked! that's certain! But then it was beautiful, too!

such good and beautiful ladies, such brave and handsome gentlemen, such lovely islands out in the summer sea—such fairies—oh! it was beautiful, too! It was just as if, you know, all your favorite saints and angels, and all the hateful sinners and demons were put into one grand book! And Blaise needn't have been such a fool as to think *I* would take pattern by the sinners and demons, and go to murdering old kings, and turning gray-headed fathers out in the storm to die—and smothering young princes! No! it made my blood boil to read about it only—and if *I'd* been on the spot—well, you know, I should have got into a scrape, that's all, because I couldn't have stood still and seen all *that* done. I'll lend *you* the book if you'd like to have it, it is as wonderful as the Lives of the Saints, or the Arabian Nights—but I reckon you're too little to care about it."

"No! oh! I can't read much, but I should like to hear about the beautiful things in it, and I will get Sister Angela to read it to me."

"Sister Angela! whew! don't think of it! Why she would think it was a great sin to *touch* a play-book, and cry her eyes out at the wickedness of children! No! I'll read some in it to you. And mind, don't you let Sister Skylights find it out."

"Sister Skylights?"

"Sister Simeon Stylites, honey!"

"Oh!"

"Yes! you see she is named in honor of that awful saint that always makes my hair bristle up when I think of him—especially on freezing winter nights, in high winds, or in burning August noons—him you know—that awful man that spent forty years upon the top of a pillar a hundred feet high."

"You mean holy St. Simeon Stylites."

"Skylights, kitten, Skylights. I prefer to call it Sky-

lights; it is so much more appropriate. Yes, well, Miss Griffin, when she came here to be a sister, which she didn't do till she was 'age-able,' as the niggers call it, had the ghastly taste to name herself for that hoary saint. So she is called in the convent, Sister Simeon Stylites—but *I* call her Sister Shining Skylights! And I'd rather advise you to keep on the bright side of her."

Little Theodora's soft gaze, that usually found repose only on the ground, was now raised and fixed upon the face of Helen, in a sort of amazed, unconscious earnestness, as if she were magnetized to that study of character.

"What are you staring at me so hard for, child?" asked the wild one, uneasily.

"Was I? I didn't know."

"Are you subject to falling into trances? Because, if you are, I can't stand it, you know! I told you I couldn't stand any thing in the ghostly way, you know. Come! don't look so down about it either, for we are going to be sworn friends, you know—brothers-in-arms, and all that—I read about *that* in a book called Sir Fabian and Sir Julian —*they* were brothers-in-arms."

"Do *you* go to school here?"

"Why of course I do! that is, I do when I choose, and only when I choose, and I wouldn't come at all, only to please Sister Angela; and she *is* a sweet saint, sure enough!"

"You only come when you choose?" repeated Theodora, in soft amazement.

"That's all," said Helen, taking evident pride in her superior independence; "I've got nobody to mind! I don't belong to any body—I'm my own woman. Sister is coming in to call school. Remember what I told you—if the girls plague you, let me know—I'm only a day scholar, any how, and don't come regular at *that!* but if I came only once a week, I could keep *them* from ill-treating you."

The Sister teacher, who had now taken her seat, rapped upon her desk and called the children to take their places.

As time passed, and nothing was heard from Theodora's relatives, she gradually fell into her place as one of the permanent inmates of the Asylum. Domestic economy formed a part of their education, and manual labor occupied a portion of their time. Thus it was, that the Orphan Asylum often turned out girls really better qualified to become intelligent and competent women, than the fine expensive female academy in the opposite wing, where all the arts, sciences, and accomplishments, attempted by such institutions anywhere, were taught.

Theodora by degrees became domesticated among the children, but remained the same gentle, retiring creature that she had been from the first. The weird witch, Nelly, continued to be her fast friend and protectress. But soon she found another and a better friend in Vivia.

Genevieve was some two or three years older than Theodora, and was a pupil in the academy, while the latter was an inmate of the asylum. Thus it happened that some months passed before they met and became acquainted with each other.

Genevieve, with her bright, healthful, confiding nature, was almost the very opposite to the shy, sensitive, shrinking Theodora; and was for that very reason, perhaps, the best friend and companion she could have, and therefore strongly attracted the gentle child.

The circumstance that brought about their first acquaintance, and led to their life-long friendship, was rather a queer one; and as it serves to illustrate the early characters of three children who take prominent parts in this story, I hope I may be pardoned for relating it, and that no Catholic or Protestant friend will, for opposite reasons, take exception to its narration.

It was this: Little Theodora had not lost her singular and saving faith in the ever present watchfulness of saints and angels—especially of her own especial patron saint of imperial memory, and her own guardian angel—and never failed silently to invoke their aid in time of need, and great and frequent was the need of the poqr little one. She was continually misapprehended, and, with the best intentions on the part of the teachers, often unjustly punished. For instance, from some constitutional or educational defect, her senses were as dull as her sensibilities were delicate; her soft brown eyes were short-sighted, and her ears were not quick to catch a passing sound; often she could not distinguish an *n* from a *u*, and her consequent mistakes in spelling and reading passed for negligence, and tried the teacher's temper quite as severely as it did the pupil's poor little tender heart; and then her tears of grief and shame passed for anger, her timidity for sullenness, and her abstraction for stupidity, and Sister Simeon would think it an absolute duty to punish so refractory a child, for the good of her temporal and eternal life. And then Theodora, in her woful prison—"the dark closet"—would invoke her saint or angel to her aid, and whether either one or the other came or not, the child was comforted in the thought that they were near. In those days, the dear Heavenly Father had been made too awful, and placed too far, and—it is a strange thing to say—but it was the effect of her babyhood's teaching, that little Theodora was far too humble to dare to pray to the Lord, to make a *spontaneous* appeal, I mean. She said the Lord's prayer, because she knew she was, with all other Christian children, permitted to do so; but no more. And when she felt her orphan state, her loneliness, or any other sorrow very deeply, it was to her patron saint or guardian angel she appealed.

Sister Simeon was Theodora's especial terror; and the child never entered the arithmetic class-room, over which

Sister Skylights presided, without trembling, turning pale, and growing many degrees blinder, deafer, and duller than before; and consequently never failed to put Sister Skylights' temper to the severest test, and to get herself into the hideous closet, or into some other deep troubles. It was not in Sister Skylights' nature not to take a dislike to a child that gave her so much trouble continually, and it was not in the nature of any thing that the little one should not be made to feel it. Not that Sister Skylights was naturally a bad hearted woman, but she labored under, yea, and wrestled with, a constitutional infirmity of temper, a severe nervous irritability, subject to periodical aggravations of symptoms that were really awful to witness. And the disciplining of little Theodora was the favorite safety-valve of her perilous ill humor. And often and often were saints and angels silently invoked to stand between the child and her teacher's wrath. It was curious, that though Sister Skylights was considered a very sensible and strictly conscientious woman, and fatigued her confessor every Saturday evening with the list of her trivial peccadillos, she never dreamed of repenting or confessing her sins against poor Theodora; but as the wearied priest himself observed—"consciences are as different as individuals."

One day in early spring, a trifling indisposition sent Theodora to the infirmary, and the child welcomed the pain and langour that gave her a few days relief from the terror of the class-room and Sister Skylights. But, alas, she did not rejoice in mental ease at the expense of physical disturbance long. It seemed, indeed, as if Sister Skylights were fated to be her evil genius, and to follow her everywhere, for she had not occupied her new cot three days, under the motherly care of Sister Petronella, whose heart was by no means so strong as her name might suggest, when a change was made in the administration of that department, and

Sister Skylights was made directress of the infirmary, *vice* Sister Petronella, removed.

I am not sure that the appearance of that terrible bugbear at her bedside did not in some occult manner produce a powerful reaction in the system of the feeble child, and frighten her into a miraculous convalescence, so that she was well before she had had time to be properly sick. At all events, it is certain she was out of bed the day after Sister Skylights' inauguration. And she was pronounced well, though weak and unfit for study and close confinement, and in need of gentle exercise and fresh air. And now poor Theodora found that, in getting out of bed, she had not got out of Sister Skylights' jurisdiction; for that exemplary woman, with the view of combining utility with hygiene, set her pupil to taking gentle exercise in sweeping out the infirmary every morning.

It was her first lesson in sweeping, and a sorrowful business it was, with such a task-mistress to teach her. But Helen had found her out, and was on the watch, and every opportunity she had, would come in and help her, but always in the absence of Sister Skylights.

One morning in the sweeping, Theodora's little broom knocked over a ewer, and broke the handle off. Down dropped her broom! and there was never such a picture of consternation as the child presented, as she stood gazing at the fragments!

"Fall of Jerusalem, Theo'! what's the matter?" called Helen, running to her when she saw her.

"Oh, what shall I do! what shall I do!" exclaimed Theodora, in the extremity of terror and despair.

"Why, what have you *done* already? that's the question."

"Oh, see what I've gone and done! See what I've gone and done!" said Theodora, dropping down on the floor, in a sitting posture, drawing the ewer and handle on

to her lap, and trying, with trembling fingers, to adjust them together. "Oh, dear! what shall I do? what shall I do?" she cried, disconsolately.

"You can't do any thing, and it's no use crying about what can't be helped," said Miss Wildman, philosophically.

"Oh, Helen! if I could only make it grow together again!" said Theodora, desperately making the attempt; "if I could only make them grow together again!"

"If you could only perform a miracle! But your friends, the saints and angels, can, you know. Why don't you ask *them*?" suggested Helen, maliciously.

"Oh, so they can, Helen! and so I will!" exclaimed Theodora, in perfectly good faith.

Miss Wildman stared.

"Oh, Helen, I'm so glad you thought of it! Stay here, dear Helen, till I run and get my prayer-book! I shall want you to make the responses, you know!" and, hiding the broken ewer under the bed, she ran out.

Helen gazed after her.

"What is the little natural going to do now, I'd like to know?" she thought.

In a few minutes Theodora returned, bringing the mass-book.

"Now, Helen, I'm going to say the 'litany of saints' over this broken ewer, to see if it won't mend it!"

"In the name of Moses, *what* are you going to do?" asked Nelly, in immeasurable astonishment.

"To say the 'litany of saints' over this broken ewer, to see if they won't please to make it whole again for me!"

"And do you really think they will do it?"

"Why, yes, I *hope* so, you know, Helen! Because either one of them could have done it as easy as kiss your hand, when they were on the earth, and *would* have done it, too, to save any poor child from blame; and do you think

they ain't just as able to do a kindness, and just as willing, too, now they are in Heaven? I don't," said Theodora, who was all this time busily engaged in turning over the leaves to find the place in the book. Having found it, she turned the book down, open, upon the floor, and then took up the ewer and handle.

"Why, you are not agoing to do that, sure enough!" exclaimed the amazed Helen.

"Oh, yes, I am, Helen! indeed I am! Here, I want you to kneel down just there, and take the ewer and the handle, and hold them together the way they ought to grow. So!"

"This way?" asked Helen, doing as she was bid, kneeling down, taking the articles in question, and holding them together in the required position.

"Yes—that way, Helen—that will do very well! Now, Helen, I'll kneel down opposite to you, and take the book, and read out the petitions, and you make the responses while you hold the handle to the ewer. And believe with all your heart, Helen, and see if the saints don't hear us!"

"Fiddle!"

"No—you musn't say 'fiddle,' you must believe, if you want the saints to help us! Now I'm going to begin," said Theodora, crossing herself.

And there they knelt on the floor of the infirmary—facing each other—one holding the broken ewer and handle together, and making resposes, while the other held the book, and read the litany of saints, in the full faith that the saints would hear and help her by a miracle.

At it they went—occasionally—children-like—interspersing the ritual with impatient improvisions of their own.

At it they went—Theodora hailing and Helen responding, as thus—

"'St. Michael!'"

"'Pray for us.'"

"'St. Gabriel!'"

—"'Pray for us.'"

"'St. Raphael!'"

"'Pray for us.'"

"'All ye holy angels and archangels!'"

—"'Pray for us.'"

"Helen, has the handle grown on yet?"

"No, I tell you! And I don't believe it's going to grow on either!"

"Oh! Helen, that's because you haven't faith! You must *believe*, if you want the saints to help us! Now let's go on again—

"'St. John?'"

—"'Pray for us.'"

"'St. Paul!'"

—"'Pray for us.'"

"'St. Vincent!'"

—"'Pray for us.'"

"'All ye holy martyrs!'"

—"'Pray for us.'"

"Has it grown together yet, Helen?"

"*No!* and the plaguey thing ain't a-goin' to grow together, neither!"

"Oh, don't say bad words, please—It's very sinful, particularly *now*—try again—"

"'St. ———!'"

She stopped short, dropped the book, and clasped her hands in an agony of terror, for—

There stood the terrible Sister, looking at them!!

How long she had been there, watching them, they, from their absorption in the litany, could not tell; but there she stood, now right over them, looking down upon them—not frowning—but laughing inwardly, until she was scarcely able to stand.

"Why, children, what are you about?" she asked, in a

softened voice, and by way of saying something, for she saw very well what they were or had been about.

Theodora was still speechless and motionless, with clasped hands.

But Helen started quickly to her feet, dropping the ewer and the handle, and saying, impatiently,

"Why, she broke the old thing by accident, and was saying the litany of saints to get it to grow together, and I was holding it, as if it had been a baby for christening, and I was its god-mother! I'm always making a fool of myself for *her*," added Miss Wildman, *sotto voce*—then speaking aloud, and turning toward the little one, she said—"There! I told you it was no use. The saints, I reckon, even if they hear you, have something else to do besides mending broken pitchers."

Sister Simeon was still laughing inwardly, but her face and her voice softened, perhaps under the genial influence of the little drollery she had happened upon—and addressing Theodora, she said,

"Why, you made much too serious a matter of such a trifle, my child! If you hadn't been so childish, and simple, and sincere in what you were about, it would have been very sinful to address the holy saints upon such a subject."

"It was *you* she was afraid of, Sister Sky—, Simeon, I mean. I do think she did expect you would bite her head off, for breaking the pitcher," said Helen, by way of giving the formidable Sister a hint of her unreasonable severity.

"What, did you think, Theodora," said Sister Simeon, with strange self-deception—"that I would have blamed you for a mere accident?"

Yes—Theodora *did* think so, and moreover she *knew* so; but she was too timid to reply.

"Get up and gather up the pieces, children, and finish sweeping the room, and don't be so silly another time," said Sister Simeon Stylite, passing out of the infirmary.

Theodora breathed a long deep sigh of relief.

But Miss Wildman was in a wanton mood, and disposed to make merry at the child's expense—

"Oh! ha, ha, ha! I shall never get over this! And so you thought the saints and angels were going to mending ewers; oh! ha, ha, ha! and without white lead and putty, too! oh! that's too good, I declare! I'll know where to go to when I'm in a scrape; and I'll get *you* to make the responses—ha, ha, ha!"

Poor Theodora drooped with mortification and regret, both upon her own account and her saints—and still she felt as if in some indirect manner they *had* saved her after all.

But Helen went on teazing, laughing, jesting and making herself merry, all in a perfectly good humored, friendly sort of way however, over the subject, until the tears were trickling down the drooping face of the child. Then Helen was smitten with compunction, and would immediately have set about her rough way of comforting the little one, but that she was anticipated by a better hand.

Vivia, who had all this time been a silent and unnoticed observer of the child, came and put her arm around her neck, and raised her little head and kissed her lips, and said,

"You did nothing wrong, Theodora. You know you did not. Why don't you say so, when you know so?"

The child raised her imploring eyes to the bright face bending over her—and though it was the first time she had ever looked upon that face, her timidity was charmed away, and she answered, softly—

"I wasn't so sure, when they laughed at me—Sister and Helen, both," said Theodora, with her eyes magnetized to that beautiful face, from which she seemed to draw life strength, and inspiration at every glance.

"*Be* sure. Listen! Your childish faith *did* save you after all. You prayed—your little heart was half broken

with grief and terror; no matter if it was a trifle in itself that caused your trouble—it was no trifle to you, as your sorrowful orphanage is no trifle to good angels—well, you prayed to the Lord."

"No—oh, no! not to the Lord; I would not have dared to pray to the Lord for any thing less than some *soul's* good."

"But why?"

"Oh! He is so high—so mighty—so awful!"

"He is our Father."

"And He is surrounded by such circles beyond circles of angels and archangels, powers, principalities, thrones and dominions; oh! you see I know them all out of the catechism! How could I dare pray to Him, and how could my prayer get through all them? every one 'glorious, glorious, glorious,' like the sun at noon. Oh! you know yourself, it would never do. So when I am in trouble, I dare not ask any one higher than the saints to help me."

"Listen. Look out of that window—you see the sun? It is shining on a thousand hills and valleys forests and fields of grain—and more than that, it is shining on many worlds as large and many times larger than this world we live on—and it is giving life to them all; but at the same time that the sun is shining upon and blessing all those other worlds, and all the great hills, and valleys, and forests, and fields of our own world, too—it is not forgetting or neglecting the smallest wild flower or blade of grass that grows under our feet. Did you ever think of that? The great earth turns toward the sun, and it is day and summer—the little flower looks up to the sun and it lives and blooms. The sun shines upon and blesses all, both great and small. So our Father, He regards the small sorrows that afflict the hearts of little children, as well as the great cares that trouble the mighty ones of the world. For you

know, the Bible says that not a sparrow falls to the ground without your Father."

But the waggish Helen, on the other side of the child, was making such faces that Theodora, still fearing she had been doing something very foolish, if not wicked, hung her head with a downcast, inconsolable air. And Vivia, lifting her chin again, and smiling in her face, said,

"Why, what is the matter? Those that succeed should rejoice, and you succeeded in your petition! Peace was what you wanted, was it not? You didn't care about the trifling ewer, that was of no value, but you cared about Sister, and feared her anger?"

"Yes."

"Why wasn't she angry?"

"Oh," said Helen, entering into the conversation, with a half-vexed, half-amused air, "because she couldn't help laughing at the figure we cut, praying to the saints over a broken pitcher!"

"Well, never mind!" smiled Vivia; "she was not angry, and the appeal to the saints was the *direct* means by which her anger was prevented. So, you see, Miss Helen, if the saints didn't miraculously mend the ewer, the purpose of the prayer was answered just as well. You know that Heaven doesn't always answer our prayers in the direct manner in which we make them, but brings about the end in better ways. Don't be laughed out of your little simple faith, Theodora, and it will be wiser when you are older."

This was the beginning of the friendship between Vivia and Theodora. And the child was thus early in life placed between two influences, in many respects antagonistic, and was alternately affected by one or the other, as Vivia or Helen was nearer to her.

CHAPTER XII.

THE VALLEY.

> Who can paint
> Like Nature? Can Imagination boast,
> Amid its gay creations, hues like hers?
> Or can it mix them with that matchless skill,
> And lose them in each other, as appears
> In every bud that blows?—*Thomson.*

THE scenery in which are located the characters and events of this story is not drawn from imagination only.

Some years ago—before the great railroad that now passes through that section was laid out,—"in the good old days" of turnpike roads, and sociable, slow stage-coaches, it was my good fortune to travel several times backward and forward through that romantic region of country. We did not rush past with that speed that threatened to bring us up nothing short of the next world. We went slowly and carefully through those wild, tortuous mountain gorges, and up and down those steep declivities, and through those broken valleys, well wooded and watered, that lay between those successive mountain ranges. In a pass, on the western declivity of one of the ridges, was the mountain hamlet, where we often stopped, and which I have vailed under the name of Eyrie. The convent also was not many miles distant.

The country was then, as now, a beautiful half-reclaimed wilderness. Successive mountain ranges ran nearly parallel from north-east to south-west, with long, narrow valleys lying between them. The mountains were covered from base nearly to summit with a sparse growth of pines, thorns,

hemlocks, cedars, and other evergreen trees. The valleys were varied with heavy forests, open glades, and running waters.

That most beautiful valley in which our story is located, lay embraced between two arms of the Alleghenies, thrown out from the main ridge, and extending some five or six miles in a westerly direction. The arm on the right side was called the North mountain, that on the left side the South mountain, or ridge.

The western extremity of the North and of the South ridge were nearly opposite to each other, and three miles apart.

The lovely valley that lay embraced between these ridges was thus in the form of a long, irregular letter U.

At the upper, or eastern bend, whence started these two arms of the mountain, was situated the convent, whose front commanded the whole down view of the beautiful valley, broken and variegated with woods and streams and rocks, and cascades from the mountain sides, and cabins nestled here and there.

At the lower end of the valley, on the right hand, the North mountain terminated in an abrupt cliff, known as Mount Storm.

And the South mountain declined gradually in a succession of rolling declivities, known as the Sunset Hills.

A wild river took its rise upon Mount Storm, dashed in a succession of falls down the side of the cliff, rushed around the foot of the precipice, and still following the base of the mountain ranges, took a bend into the valley, and wound in and out and around the Sunset Hills, until it reached the open country, where it flowed on leisurely to join the great, distant river, just visible to those who might stand upon the hill-tops.

Beyond the valley the country was broken, hilly, and

mountainous—towering into other ridges, and falling into other valleys, for hundreds of miles in all directions.

In form the terminus of the North mountain, the cliff of Mount Storm, bore some resemblance to a pair of steps of stupendous size, and was thence often called the Titan's step. It presented an equally suggestive likeness to an enormous chair, of which the lower step formed the seat, and the upper step the back, and from that circumstance it was sometimes named the Giant's chair.

The lower step, or the seat of the chair, or the ledge of the cliff, just as you please to call it, was about half-way down the front of the mount, and comprised an area of several acres in extent, connected with a deep alluvial soil. Upon this ledge the manor-house, with all its commodious outbuildings had been erected; and the ground had been laid out, terraced and planted, exotic trees had been set, and those indigenous to the soil thinned out and trimmed.

The manor was a square, double-fronted, three-storied house, built of variegated granite, that gave it quite a mosaic appearance. There was a handsome, rather heavy portico at the main entrance;—above the portico and in the second story was a bay window; above that also in the third story another. And in every story, two windows each side the centre, making twelve in all. The house stood about midway the area, in the centre of the ornamental ground. A terraced shrubbery and flower-garden lay before; and a kitchen garden, vines, and choice fruit trees behind. While several rods beyond arose the front of the rock—not straight up, but bending backward as it rose.

Wild and beautiful, and in some respects well chosen as this site was, it did not prevent stern matter-of-fact people from calling it at first "Malmaison's Madness." But in the course of time the place got its proper name. The winds that raved around the exposed cliff procured for it the apellation of Mount Storm.

Some two or three miles up the valley was an old fashioned farm-house, called, from its standing under the shelter of another towering precipice, "Gray Rock," while still farther up and lying midway between Gray Rock and the Convent, was another farm-house known as Red Ridge. The farms attached to these homesteads comprised a portion of the North mountain, and a part of the valley lying below it.

These were all the estates on the North side of the valley.

You already know that Mount Storm was occupied by that "Snowy Florimel," the young widow, Mrs. Malmaison, her son Austin, her housekeeper Bridget, her manager Jimmy Dougherty, and her household servants.

Gray Rock was the home of Doctor Thogmorton, his wife and her children.

And Red Ridge was tenanted by Basil Wildman.

But it is with none of these that we have to do just now, but with a small cabin in a sparse cluster of stunted pine-trees upon the top of the mountain, and appertaining to the Gray Rock estate. It was known as the Gray Rock Cabin. It was an old log house, containing but one square room, with a loft over it. It fronted south, and its only door looked down upon the valley and across the opposite mountain. It had a chimney of rough hewn rocks at the back of the house, north;—a small window east and another west, with the door south as I said. A dilapidated fence straggled around an impoverished looking garden, and beyond that were sterile patches of ground once cultivated, now hidden under the snow. And all around on the mountain were the stunted growth of evergreens, and in the valley below the varied scene of woods and streams and open glades before described.

The cabin was occupied by a miserably poor widow, and her three children—a boy and twin girls. How they sub-

sisted that dreadful winter, none but He who feeds the ravens could tell.

While the husband and father, Abraham Brunton lived, he had supported them by day labor on the surrounding farms, by cutting wood and hauling it to the nearest town for sale, and by hunting upon the mountains; while his wife kept the cabin, tended the little vegetable-garden, took care of a cow that supplied them with milk and butter, kept some poultry that brought them eggs, and two pigs that were destined to be changed into winter bacon. Besides this, she spun and wove all the coarse domestic cloth for the children's clothing, and knitted all their stockings. And sometimes she wove carpets for such housekeepers as kept no loom or weaver at home.

But after the death of her husband, who had now been dead some years, the widow and her children had suffered very much—suffered a great deal from inevitable poverty, and a great deal more from the losses and privations consequent upon ignorance. Her garden, that might have been a source of great help to herself and children, was suffered to fall into sterility for the want of proper cultivation.

But after all, she in her ignorance was only following the same fatal course that rich valley farmers, in the utter recklessness of extravagance, were pursuing—that is to say—starving the land and exhausting its substance, by cropping it year after year, without returning it any nutriment in the shape of manure, or giving it any rest for natural recuperation.

Poor Mrs. Brunton, in her bleak mountain cabin, did—"the best she could." She took in spinning, weaving, dyeing—in short, any work that she knew how to do, and could procure; and she went out for a day's labor whenever the opportunity offered, which was not very often in a neighborhood where nearly all the labor was performed by the negroes.

Her son Wakefield, a fine boy of twelve years of age, helped her as much as he possibly could, not only in the quantities of game he brought home from the mountain hunts, of which he was so fond, and in the roughest and most laborious part of the house and garden work, and in taking care of his little sisters during her absence, but in many indirect ways that none but the most affectionate and thoughtful nature would discover.

It was a cold, bitterly cold evening in February. The snow was two feet deep on the mountains, and frozen over with a thick crust of ice. Every pine and cedar, thorn and hemlock, was weighed down with a deposit of snow.

The sun was down, and the northwest wind was up, and raved and howled around the widow's little ruinous log cabin, threatening at every gust to blow it over. For ruinous the poor little cabin really was. In spite of the best care, the rude, unseasoned material of which it was built would wear old, the logs would dry and shrink, and the clay daubing between them would crumble and fall out. In the same manner the mortar between the stones of the chimney would pulverize and fall, and the timber of which the door and window sashes were made would decay. So, though the one door and the two windows might be shut as closely as possible, the wind had its own way, and entered at any side or angle of the walls or the fireplace where it listed to blow.

This evening especially the wind was, as the widow declared, "trying of itself,"—sometimes it moaned and wailed in the deep ravines like the lost spirits in the bottomless pit—sometimes it rushed roaring up the sides of the mountain, whirling, rending and raging among the trees, like the aforesaid spirits let loose upon the earth; and sometimes it made a dead set upon the poor little cabin, shaking and rattleing its loose logs like dry bones or castanets upon which it pleased to play weird music. Sometimes it fell

back as if to gather breath and get ready for a spring, and then making most ungenerous use of its power, would rush upon the little door or windows in such a storm that it was a miracle the whole house was not whirled before it like a dried leaf.

But the wind was an old acquaintance of the widow's, a frequent visitor at the cottage, in fact an intimate friend of the family, and not a fair-weather friend, by any means, but one that had been faithful to them in adversity as in prosperity, "and more so too;" for the poorer they became, the older and looser their log house, the thinner and shabbier and fewer their garments, why the more sociable and affectionate and caressing the wind! In truth, the wind was an example to summer friends. The family knew it, too! and perhaps that was the reason they rather liked its rude music, and took all its stormy assaults as so much rough play.

The widow herself declared that she did not care how it blew, if it would only not blow down the chimney, and send clouds of smoke and a little hailstorm of sparks from the fireplace into the room.

And upon this evening the wind, though it raved and roared and raged—though it wailed and howled and shrieked—though it wrenched and twisted and tore the great forest trees—though it stormed and cannonaded and bombarded the house—though it did everything that the most imaginative poet or *exaggerative* novel-wright ever accused it of doing—"with a perfect looseness"—yea, indeed, though it did, to cap the climax in the widow's expressive language, "try itself,"—yet it did not blow down the chimney and put the cottage fire out. On the contrary, it "drew," and the great pine logs piled up in the capacious fireplace sent a glorious blaze roaring up the broad chimney, and also a glorious light and warmth, and a pleasant, wholesome, resinous odor through the humble room; and from the little

uncurtained windows, east and west, that fire sent long glowing streams of ruddy light far out upon the winter snow—a very cheerful beacon to all who might see it. And upon this evening far and wide was this light seen.

It was seen by the people of the valley, who knew that that lonely, cheerful light upon the mountain came from the widow Brunton's cottage.

It was seen by Mrs. Thogmorton, at Gray Rock, who, looking out of the window of her back parlor upon the gathering night, wondered carelessly what the poor widow and orphans had for supper, or if they had anything, and then turned, with new appreciation and great gusto, to the enjoyment of her warmly carpeted and curtained room, her comfortable lounging chair, and the anticipated enjoyment of a well-spread tea table.

It was seen by Blaise Wildman, who, looking out of the kitchen-door at Red Ridge, swore it was "going to be a honey-cooler of a night," hoped that poor widow and her children were not starving to death, vowed that "he ought to be codwopple-hammered for not sending her some provisions," and wished that what's-his-name, from the warmer climate, might come and fetch him if he didn't send her a bag of meal and a side of bacon the very next blessed morning; and that he might be blamed if he didn't go and see after her *himself*, too. And by the Abbess giving alms from the front portico of her Convent, and who, casting her dark eyes over the wintry landscape and around upon the gathering darkness, chanced to descry the light streaming redly from the mountain hut, east and west, over the snow, and who, gazing on it, said to herself,

"She never comes to ask assistance, although she must be in great need. I wish we could possibly get her little girls into the asylum. I must send to-morrow and see after them."

Finally that cheerful beacon light was seen by a hand-

some, sturdy lad in a homespun suit, with a fox-skin cap, and a gun and a bunch of game across his shoulder, who came singing a song as he trudged through the crusted deep snow, among the stunted pines and cedars up the mountain side.

Was the widow in such desperate need as her wealthy neighbors thought? We shall see. Let us re-enter the cabin. Its one room is poor and poorly furnished enough, Heaven knows! But the glorious fire is a luxury that the most costly and elegant saloon would, I am sure, be the handsomer for, and which it cannot have. And that glowing fire lighted up and displayed every nook and corner, high and low, of a room just perfect in its cleanliness. Indeed, it seemed as if the poorer that widow became the more fastidious she grew. It was as if the last refuge of her worldly pride and ambition, if not of her self-respect, was to be found only in the immaculate cleanliness of her surroundings. There was no great degree of neatness, order, or beauty in the arrangement of her room—there was only pure cleanliness and just so much of neatness, order, etc., as was compatible with unplastered log walls, an uncarpeted deal floor, old, ricketty, misshapen and mismatched furniture, and windows broken and mended with paste and paper. But the *perfect* purity! Soap and water was that woman's only extravagance, and it became her! Besides the pleasing cleanliness, there was the glowing, glorious fire, which I am proud of as the great item of luxury in the room, as it undoubtedly was, and which, being immediately opposite the door, was the first object that would meet your eyes on opening it and entering.

There was before you, on the right of the chimney, a dresser of two shelves, filling up all the space across from the fireplace to the corner, and resplendent with two rows of brightened pewter plates and dishes leaned against the wall and further adorned by a set of cheap crockeryware,

that were made the most of by the saucers being turned down in rows, and the cups set upon top of them, with the teapot and sugar bowl at one end, leading the pile.

On the left of the chimney was the widow's loom, now laid up in idleness for the want of work.

On the right of the door by which you entered, stood the low-posted oaken bedstead, with its bed and blue domestic yarn counterpane, and pillows in pillow-cases so white that they might put many fine housekeepers to the blush.

On the left of the door was the ladder that went up into the loft, and under it, half-hidden in the shade of the corner, was the widow's spinning-wheel—idle also for the want of wool to spin.

About in spots, wherever there was room for them, sat three or four rough, home-made pine chairs, the work of poor Brunton deceased.

In the middle of the floor stood an oak table, also of domestic manufacture by the same hand. This table boasted no cloth, but it was scoured to such a milky whiteness, that the want was not felt. That was *all* in the way of furniture, if we except the kettle that was singing over the fire, the oven that contained the corn pone on the hearth, and a few other little household utensils.

There was no superfluity of any description whatever—no little vanities in the way of ornament, no cheap looking-glass or low-priced picture, or plaster-of-paris dog or parrot or angel, as may be sometimes seen in such cabins—nothing but the hardest, barest necessaries of life; yet over all and through all there was a sort of homely comfort and picturesque beauty difficult to analyze.

So much for the *still* life.

Of the *conscious* life in that room there was first the widow, a tall, thin, muscular-looking woman, with dark hair and eyes, and a dark, sun-burned, wind-beaten, care-

worn face. She wore a plain gown of some coarse stuff that had once been black, but that now, through long wear and frequent washings, had faded to an iron-gray. A blue checked handkerchief folded across her bosom, and a blue checked apron tied around her waist; coarse yarn stockings, and shoes clumsy with frequent mending, completed her attire; her head was bare, and her hair was twisted up behind and tucked under a horn comb in the very plainest manner.

The two little girls, the twin sisters, Alice and Annie, were pretty brunettes, right comfortably clad in homespun linsey, that had once been as many hued as the rainbow, but had by dint of frequent intercourse with soap and water faded into an indiscriminate cloud of no particular color at all. Between these two children on the floor was a basket of cotton wool, in which slept a nest of young kittens, that the young girls were never tired of looking at, taking out, nursing, petting, warming, and worrying all in most motherly tenderness conceivable.

While the children played, the mother busied herself by taking down the cups and saucers and the pewter plates from the dresser, and arranging them upon the table, and going now and then first to one window, next to the other, and then to the door to look out into the wintry night, saying, as she returned to her task,

"I wonder where your brother is, children! It is very cold. The wind blows as if it would take the roof off the house! I wish he would come in."

Ah! it was easy to see by the expression of that poor woman's face as she looked, and the tone of her voice as she spoke, that her heart was "wrapped up" in that boy, just as all the poor neighbors said it was. When she spoke, the little girls would look up from their play and answer nothing at all, or only say,

"I wish he may bring us home a live bird to keep."

The widow finished setting the table, by putting a pitcher of milk and a pat of butter upon it. And then she sat down in the chimney corner and took her knitting; but she had not knit many rounds before she heard the joyous carol of the boy's voice, as he approached the house, singing. In another moment he came in with a lad's gay inoffensive assumption of manliness, exclaiming,

"Well! here I am, mother! all right! and lots of game!" And then he stood his gun down with a sounding thump in the corner, and cast his bunch of partridges and a pair of rabbits upon the floor—all in a sturdy, off-hand sort of way, as if he did not think much of what he had done that day, and was a long way above making any amount of it.

"Come to the fire, my boy—make haste—do come—you must be frozen," said Mrs. Brunton affectionately.

"Oh! not a bit of it! dear, no! never felt warmer. Field sports warm up the blood, you know! So Blaise Wildman says! and it's the truth, I reckon! Oh! my! hasn't he got a cousin, though! ain't she a trump! Well! here they are, mother," he said, taking up the bunch of game, and feeling the birds—"they are not very fat!—contrary-wise, I think they are very lean. They don't get much picking now, you know, when the snow is on the ground. Poor things, with their short commons they fare so much like ourselves that I have quite a fellow-feeling for them, and feel as if I committed a sort o' murder in killing them! But that little witch of a Nelly! Oh! ain't she one of them, though! Beasts of prey! they call the wild animals beasts of prey! When here am I who hear the gospel preached to me once a month, and here is Blaise who is book-learned, and little Nelly, that's a girl naturally, and I'm blamed, when we're killing these little speckled creatures in their own homes, if I don't feel as if we were worse beasts of prey than the dumb ones! and we hear the gospel preached too!"

"But the gospel says, 'Rise Peter, kill and eat.'"

"The gospel says Peter *dreamt that*, when he was very hungry. Hows'ever, mother, here are the birds, about two dozen of them, I reckon—enough to make two or three rare pies—and here are two rabbits, almost big enough to stuff and roast like pigs. Wonder if there be any superior order of beings that kill and eat *us*, in some way that we don't understand, and all without our knowing it, as we do the rabbits and partridges—I'm blamed if I don't sometimes think it's likely!" said the boy, as he hung the game up on a nail near the dresser.

"You do get some of the wildest notions, Wake, and I think it must be 'cause you go so much among the wild varmints."

"Ha, ha, ha! mother, *that's* the wildest thought of all—shouldn't wonder if I got them all from *you*, mother dear."

"I was always counted a believer, Wake!"

"So am I, mother."

"And in nothing *more* and nothing *less* than is set down in Holy Writ."

"So am I, mother, only we don't know, Lord help us, how much *is* set down there, long as we can't read for ourselves."

"That's the truth, too! La, Wake, when I was your age, I had such an ambition to learn how to read. Oh, I remember when I was a little girl out at service at old Madame Thogmorton's!—sometimes I would hear the young ladies read, and then, oh! I got such glimpses of the joys and delights there was in the insides of the wonderful little books! But when I opened them and looked to see if *I* could make out any thing by gazing, they were just as dumb to me as a stone! And then the young ladies, you know, would feel tickled half to death, to see how I used to loiter, with my 'mouth and eyes wide open,' they said—though I don't believe *that*—to catch and swal-

low some o' the reading! Then they made me bring my work in the parlor of an evening, to sit and listen to the reading. And as I stand here this minute, with this coffee-pot in my hand, I do believe they enjoyed their book twice as much for seeing how *keen* I enjoyed it; for they would look at me, and be tickled to death sometimes! And, oh! I did enjoy it—*keen*, I tell you! Oh, Wake! them was evenings! Mr. William—Doctor Thogmorton that is now, would come in when we were all in the parlor after tea, and bring a little book, may-be no bigger than—than your *two hands* laid flat together, yet in that book he would sit down and read to the young ladies round the work-table, and to me on the stool—there would be the greatest sights of histories about nations, and kings and queens and battles, and murders and sudden deaths that would make your head feel old. And then, *another* evening there'd be another book no bigger, yet that seemed to hold all the whole world, with the most wonderful stories of distant countries that you never dreamed of; some countries where it is almost always freezing winter like this, some where it is burning summer all the year round; and then the different races of people; and the wild animals; and wonderful birds and fishes! And then other evenings again there would be other books, full of stories about knights and ladies and castles that would make my heart *burn*. And sometimes there was beautiful poetry that would melt my bosom like a snow-ball before the fire, and make the tears run down my face in the foolishest way! But, whether I laughed or cried or *gaped*, as they said I did, I know one thing, I made a great deal of fun for them somehow, for sometimes they would laugh at me until they were scarcely able to stir! Never mind! I didn't care much, for ah! boy, those hours were like the kingdom of heaven come down, and not one of those books have I ever forgotten, or what was read in them, either! *That* does make me be able to amuse you with telling

curious things these long winter evenings while I sit and knit."

"But why mightn't some of the young ladies teach you to read, mother; that's what *I* wonder."

"Laws, Wake, didn't I ask them often and often? and so they would, may be, only they were too much given to idleness like; and besides their brother, Mr. William, Doctor Thogmorton that now is, wouldn't hear tell of sich a thing for one minute; and he said a great deal about mixing up of classes, and making poor folks feel above their places, and so on, with a great deal of fine talk about things that I couldn't make head or tail of, 'cept that the likes of *me* were not to learn to read like the likes of *them*. And may be it might be so, the Lord above knows—no it wa'n't neither! I won't say it was, if an angel told me so! because I know better all out of my own heart! And I wish I *had* learned to read, Wake, so that I might teach you these long winter evenings, and no thanks to the school that we can't afford to send you to," concluded the widow, as she took the tongs, raised the lid from the oven, and finding her corn-pone well done, proceeded to turn it out upon a large pewter-plate, and set it upon the table, whence its sweet, fresh, warm scent filled the room. Then she polished off the coffee-pot and set it on the waiter, and then took the single salt herring from the gridiron, put it on a little dish and placed it also on the board. The sweet pat of butter, the jug of milk and the maple-sugar being there before—the supper was now ready. And she set the chairs, and put the two little girls up on each side, while the sole representative of the "boys" took off his upper jacket and hung it up, and giving his head a shake by way of dressing his hair, came forward to take the place as man of the house, at the foot of the table.

He was a fine, well grown, handsome lad, with dark hair,

and eyes like his mother's and sisters', and a fresh ruddy complexion, and a warm, frank smile.

"Sometimes, mother," he said, as he cut the pone and helped his little sisters to bread, while the widow filled their mugs with milk, "sometimes, you know, I feel discontented, because I can't have what I see other boys have, nor go to school like they do, and the rest of it—and then again, mother, I hardly know how it is but my mind changes altogether, and I feel like I do now, as if I was the very happiest boy in the world, with such a dear mother—mother, here! you take the middle piece of the fish, with the roe in it."

When they had finished their meal, Wakefield got up and took his little sisters down from their chairs, and wiped their little hands and faces with a wet towel, and turned them to play with the cat and kittens, while he set up the chairs and poured out a pan full of hot water for his mother to wash the dishes.

Then while she cleared up the supper-table, arranged the neat dresser, and swept the hearth, he went out into the rough shed and split up a quantity of wood, a part of which he piled up for the morning's kindling, and a part of which he brought in for present use.

The widow had drawn the table to the fire, and lighted a home-dipped tallow candle, (they had eaten supper by the bright light of the fire, which was quite as bright as ever, but Mrs. Brunton preferred to have the candle also.) And she had taken her chair and her knitting, and sat down to work. The little girls had taken their low stools, and nestled themselves close to her skirts, begging, though it was six o'clock, to sit up just a little while and hear mother tell stories. All this had been done while Wakefield was out chopping wood.

And when at last he had finished and brought in armful after armful, and piled it up for the evening's use, he drew

a chair and sat down opposite his mother at the table—and as soon as he had thoroughly rested, he began to be very uneasy for the want of occupation. He got up and walked about the room, looked out of the windows, took another turn or two and came back and set down. Then got up again, took another turn, looked in upon the cat and kittens, teased his little sisters in a gentle sort of way, came and sat down again, yawned and wished it was bedtime, or that he was dead—he felt so lonesome! meaning that he felt mentally so vacant, so hungry, so weary of idleness and inanity.

There is not by any means too much sympathy expended upon physical starvation, but mental starvation is a thing almost entirely ignored, though the latter is far more frequently to be seen than the former.

"Mother, is there nothing I can do for you, this evening?" he asked, drearily.

"No, Wake!"

"Whatever shall I do with myself, mother? I'd go to bed *now*, only I know I should lay awake and feel lonesome all the same. Ain't *you* never lonesome, mother?"

"Yes, Wake."

"And what do you do?"

"Work as hard as I can, Wake—and if that don't do, I say my prayers."

"And if *that* don't do, mother."

"Why then I bear it as well as I can till the feeling goes off, Wake—and it *does* go after a while, just as any other bad feeling does. It's a sort o' low heart-ache, one must try to get rid of it by fair means, and if they can't they must just bear with it like it was a grumbling tooth, until it goes of its own accord. That's my thoughts. Now Wake, you are having a bad feeling over you, and if you can't get shut of it no way, just try to bear it till it goes of its own accord, and it will soon go."

"Yes, mother, but it comes on now every day of my life, and

particular in the evening, and it lasts *bad* from supper time till bedtime, four hours every night, as near as we can guess without a clock."

"Well, you must be patient, and recollect the many reasons you counted up just now for being the happiest boy in the whole world."

"Well, I *felt* happy then, mother. I reckon it was because I had something to do—I had supper to eat, you know, and wood to chop. And now there's nothing: oh, dear!"

"Well, these days won't last forever," said the mother, concluding with a half-suppressed sigh, as if she stifled the thought that there might be as much to fear as to hope in a change.

What poor widowed mother has not felt the same, even while working hard for the needy children that gather in security around her hearth in the evening? alas! as much to fear as to hope in their growing up, God comfort and guard and guide them!

"Mother, I wouldn't feel so bad, nor grumble so, if I only could learn to read—for if I could *read*, mother, that would put me in the way of learning every thing else, I am sure it would! I could borrow books from Blaise, and from the Sisters up yonder, too, and teach myself all these long winter evenings, and afterward teach pretty sisters, and read to you all, too! Whereas now, I have to mope away in worthless idleness all these long, dismal evenings, and all the rainy days, wasting such lots of time that I might be getting such a splendid education. Its enough to make a boy—"

He broke off short, and passed his cuff across his eyes. His mother laid her hand upon his shoulder:

"Never mind, Wake!"

"But I *do* mind, mother, and I can't help mindin'. Here I'm 'most *thirteen* years old, and I don't know a letter in the book! I don't want to stay here grubbing on this old

mountain forever! I want to learn something and go somewhere and do something of some account! And I want you and sisters to be better off and to have things! I don't see the use of being alive, if *this* is all!"

And again the mother's gentle hand was laid upon his shoulder, and her loving voice said,

"What a poor, discontented boy you are getting to be, Wakefield! I am sorry to see it, Wake. You 'don't see the use of being alive, if *this* is all!' Oh, Wake! the use of being alive is to do the will of Him who gave us life, and to grow better and better every year we live—and that we can do, Wake, here in our poverty on this mountain, as well as anywhere else in this world! We are put on this earth, Wake, to prepare for a better world; and that we can do on this mountain, Wake, as well as anywhere else in this world! Riches is a good thing, Wake, and learning is a better; but righteousness is best of all, Wake, for it will save us both in this world and the next. And if we cannot be rich and great, Wake, and if we cannot be wise and learned, we can be better than that—we can be honest and true! honest and true, Wake!"

"Why," she added, smiling, "that is what I often think about our little housekeeping. We can't have rich furniture and beautiful pictures and costly books in our house, nor would they suit it; but we can have an ornament that is better than them, and that ever so many costly things would be of poor account without—we can have pure cleanness in our clothes and in our cabin. And so in our *souls;* if we can't have wisdom and learning, we can have what is better than them—pure cleanness there, too. When I wash the children in the morning, and myself, too, I do often pray to the Lord to keep our souls clean. Yes, Wake! if we can't have worldly wealth and wisdom, we can have clean souls, and in clean bodies, anyhow."

"Yes, mother, but, you know, it seems to me I might

just as well have an education as not, and be getting it, too, these long winter evenings. And it is so tiresome to have nothing to do ; and the evenings are so long ! now, to reckon by the length of that candle it can't be more than half-past six yet ! What *shall* I do ?"

"Now, I'll tell you what you can do—you can pick those partridges. And while you are doing it, I will tell you all the story of King Alfred and the wars of the Danes, as I heard it read long ago. But stop; here are these poor little things gone to sleep—without their story, too ! I must put them to bed first."

So saying the mother tenderly raised first one sleeping child, and then the other, and carefully undressing them, laid them on the bed.

"I don't like the children to go to sleep without saying their little prayers, but it don't happen very often," she said.

Wakefield had got down his bunch of game, and his basket to receive the feathers, and was seated in the chimney-corner, at his task of picking the birds. And his mother, sitting down resuming her knitting, began to tell him all she remembered of the history of England, very much in the same style, and with the same comments that any one else would tell a story, "beginning at the beginning" and skipping over large intervals of time, and very important events that had been forgotten, merely because they had not impressed her imagination, merely filling up the neglected spaces, and connecting the narrative by saying that in that time a number of kings reigned and made war and died, or got killed, and then resuming her narrative at the next well-remembered epoch. Thus she skipped from the Roman Invasion to the story of King Alfred ; from him to William the Conqueror—thence to the lion-hearted Richard and his crusade, and his wicked successor John, and the story of Prince Arthur—thence to Edward I., and the invasion of

Scotland, with the story of Sir William Wallace. Then with a jump forward over a hundred years, and the crowned heads of a half a dozen kings, or so, she came to the reign of Henry V., the invasion of France, and the story of Joan of Arc, and from that, with a leap, to the humpback usurper, Richard III., and his murdered nephews—then on to the story of the Royal Bluebeard, and his six wives—and so on to Mary, and her successor Elizabeth, and the history of the religious persecutions of those days—and then on to the tragic story of Charles I., and then of Cromwell.

And that brought them to such a late hour, that the mother stopped her narrative, rolled up her knitting, and began to set the room in order for the night.

The boy's hungry, active mind was digesting rapidly the crude material it had received, and drawing nutriment for strong and independent thought. And while he put on a fresh log to keep the fire all night, he said,

"It seems to me, mother, from all I've learned of history, the great trouble was from people's getting too much power in their hands. For it seems to me whether it was Catholic, or Protestant, or Presbyterian,—or Pope, or King, or Cromwell—whichever of them got the power, never failed to turn Turk, and cut up the very—old gentleman!"

And with this profound moral drawn from history, the boy-philosopher lighted his candle, bid his mother good-night, and went up stairs. The woman also was soon at rest. But even after midnight had settled darkest over all the scene—the fire on the mother's cottage hearth, sent out through the windows, east and west, a ruddy, cheerful light.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MORNING STAR.

Thoughts of great deeds were mine, dear maid, when first
The clouds that wrap this world from youth did pass.
I do remember well the hour which burst
The spirit's sleep—in one that could not be
Aught but a lifeless clod, until inspired by thee.—*Shelley.*

THE next morning was as glorious as ever dawned upon this earth. The valley lay bathed in sunshine, its fields of frosted snow, its forests of glittering icicles blazed back a white, insufferable splendor, equal to that of the rising sun. From the stillness of the air, and the mild warmth of the morning sun, it might be known that, ere the day declined, the icy glories of this wintry scene would be melted away.

They were early risers at the widow's cabin.

Mrs. Brunton was up, had dressed her two little girls, made her bed, swept the room, and was getting breakfast, when Wakefield appeared upon the ladder leading from his loft.

Wake had been up as early as his mother, had made his simple day's toilet, and had set his room in perfect order, to fill up the half hour before he durst intrude below.

"Good morning, mother dear," he said, gayly, as he crossed the kitchen and took two pails to bring water. As the spring was not far from the house, he soon returned, and set the pails of water on the rude bench that usually held them. "And now, mother," he asked, bringing in an old tub from the shed, "what am I to give poor Sukey for her breakfast? She had the last of the hay yesterday morning, and it was but a handful."

"You must cut up some of the carrots and turnips for her. It is a great waste, as few vegetables as we have, and really it does seem like taking the victuals out of the children's mouths to give them to the cow, but then it would be a sin to keep on milking and starving her, poor thing!"

"Why, so it would, mother! though it does seem hard to have to feed away our precious little stock of carrots and turnips, for the want of fodder that costs so little, and would be just as good for her."

"Ah, Wake, it is—'The poverty of the poor is their destruction,' as the Bible says. Half the time they haven't the chance to save if they would. And then richer people, with all things convenient about them, blame the poor for their extravagance. But never mind *that*. It is no use to complain of it, for there is so much nonsense talked and acted in this world, and so much injustice done in one way and another, that it would be worse nonsense to mention it."

"Now you mustn't be stingy to poor Sukey. She gives us sweet milk for breakfast and supper," said little Annie, who understood nothing of the subject of conversation, except that her favorite's provender was in debate.

"No, you mustn't be stingy to poor, dear Sukey, Wake," chimed in little Allie, who was always an echo to her sister.

"No, no, my children, we wouldn't, for your sakes, stint Sukey. There now you may go and help Wake to break up the carrots, and put them in the tub for Sukey. And then, as the morning is so pleasant, you may come to the door and see her eat her breakfast, while I milk," said their mother.

Wakefield had brought in a large basket of those roots, and set it with the tub near the door, and the little girls went as permitted to help him with his job, while their mother set the table and made the coffee. By the time she had done these things, and was ready to milk the cow, they had the food prepared, and Wake carried the tub out and set it

under Sukey's nose, while his mother took her milking stool and pail and commenced operations. A poor looking, red and white cow was Sukey, seeming quite haggard and careworn, as if she were altogether a member of the family, and bore her share of all their anxieties and responsibilities, as she certainly did in their privations and—their affections. When the milking was over they all came in, Mrs. Brunton strained the milk, while the children watched her with as much interest as if they had never seen that process before. and then their breakfast was put upon the table. It was almost exactly similar in fare to the supper of the night previous, only that the remaining half of the cold pone had been sliced and toasted.

"I think, mother, I'll go out and mend the fence this morning, for as soon as the snow melts, and the frost is out of the earth—and that will be soon now—it will be time to break up the ground for planting the garden."

"You may do that if you can, Wake; but I don't believe there's a nail in the house."

"Oh, yes there is, mother; I got a shilling last week in Eyrie for holding a gentleman's horse, and I bought some; I put a new handle on the hammer, too, the other day, you know. La! I had as lief be without my hands as without a hammer and nails!" laughed the lad, as going into the woodshed he brought forth the tools, and a bundle of old palings. Then he went out to the scene of his morning's work—the straggling, dilapidated old fence that enclosed the lot of three acres, in the midst of which the cabin stood.

But ere he had commenced, the morning landscape, the sublime and beautiful mountain and valley scenery, clothed now in its winter garb of snow, and frost, and ice, all glancing, flashing and sparkling in the dazzling light of the morning sun—like hills and fields and forests of alabaster, pearls and diamonds—caught and spell-bound his eyes and his soul. None but a bright, strong eye could look

so long upon that blinding radiance. Below him declined his own mountain-side, a precipice of snow, spiked over with countless stunted pines and cedars, whose dark green foliage glittered with frost drops.

Below the mountain lay the valley, its fields all shining in snow, and its forest trees sparkling in their winter foliage of icicles. Mad River, now concealed by snow, looked like a tortuous great gully, with trees and shrubbery in their dress of ice, growing up and down along the ragged banks.

Before him, on the other side of the valley, arose the South mountain covered with snow, and quilled with evergreens, powdered over with diamond dust of frost. An unknown wilderness was that South mountain; from the point where it started, the great range of the Alleghenies above the Convent, to its western termination, opposite Mount Storm, where it fell into those beautiful rolling, half-wooded declivities called the Sunset Hills, there had not been a tree felled or a house raised.

In all the white and shining landscape, the only points of color were the dark hue of the evergreen trees on either mountain range, or scattered sparsely through the valley;—the red group of Convent buildings up the eastern extremity of the vale:—the chimneys and gable ends of Gray Rock at the right hand, some quarter of a mile down; and the long, rambling, ruinous old farm-house of Red-Ridge a mile or so up the valley, and near the Convent. As the two last mentioned homesteads were close under the shelter of the mountain range upon which our boy spectator stood, he could see but little of them except their roofs and chimneys.

Yes! there was another item of color, the brightest of all in the snowy landscape. As the boy turned his eyes up toward the Convent buildings, where the newly risen sun was shining brightly above them, he descried a little figure in a scarlet cloak coming down the valley. She was yet so

far off that he could not have seen her but for the brightness of her raiment, that shone like fire amid the snow. He did not know that it was the morning star of his life about to rise upon him. How should he of course? We never know how much of our future destiny lies in the hands of those of whose very existence we are unconscious. Wakefield turned and addressed himself to his work. And as he hammered away and got warm and interested in his labors, he forgot all his discontent, his spirits arose to the effervescing point and overflowed in song, and he worked and sang until an hour had passed by; his songs had ceased, but he was still hammering industriously, when a voice spoke to him,

"Good morning, Wakefield! you are very hard at work."

The boy started, for so engaged had he been that he had not seen or heard the approach of any one, but now he recognized before him the figure of the little girl that he had seen coming down the valley.

There the bright creature stood like the impersonation of confidence and joy; and by her side was a huge tawny bulldog, who, after taking a good look and smell at Wakefield, made up his opinion that there was nothing deleterious about him, and gave his judgment in a growl of modified approbation.

"Good morning, Miss," returned the lad, gazing at the radiant visitant before him with something of surprise, and something of the undisguised, honest admiration of a frank, warm-hearted boy.

"You wonder at my knowing your name, but I have known *you* a long time, Wakefield, although you don't know me."

"I wa'n't aware that I was so famous," replied the lad, smiling and slightly flushing.

"—As you may be some of these days, do you mean, Wakefield?"

"Did you know *that* foolishness too? Why you must be a spirit!" said the boy, fearing when he heard that accidental speech, that his cherished day-dreams had somehow come to light.

"Why, I am a spirit," said the visitor, smiling gayly, "and I know a great number of things."

The boy looked up at the bright head and face of the speaker, with the brown clusters of little spiral ringlets, and the brilliant rose bloom, and the star-like hazel eyes that seemed to lighten even while they smiled on him, and he thought the "spirit" had taken a beautiful form; and then he glanced at the great brute at her side, and thought that the spirit had also an unwonted attendant.

"You are looking at my dog—how do you like him? You see that he approves *you*."

"I am greatly obliged to him I'm sure, and like him according—but does he always go with you!"

"Yes, always! he loves me so, and it would hurt his heart to be left behind."

"*His* heart, Miss?"

"Yes—and I wouldn't hurt the feelings of a dumb beast because it *is* dumb, and cannot complain. Their lives are such a mystery to us. They have no words, and men say that they have no souls, yet they have more intelligence and affection than they can express, and they know so much more, and love so much more than they can tell. Now look at this dog—he knows well enough that I am praising his race."

The dog pressed his great head against the girl's cloak, and batted his eyes as in affirmation.

"A wink is as good as a nod for a dumb dog as well as a blind horse—isn't it, old boy?" said Wakefield, patronizing the animal. "But won't you come in the house, miss?"

"My name is Genevieve. Yes, I will go in the house.

You need not leave your work to show me the way; I can find it out."

"Oh, I've done for the present," said the lad, driving the last nail, and then taking up his tools to attend her.

When they entered the cabin they found every thing in perfect order. And Mrs. Brunton was sitting by the cheerful fire, knitting away upon her second stocking, while the first one lay across her knees for the convenience of measurement. The children were sitting as close to her skirts as they could get—it was their way—and were highly delighted in trying their skill in knitting work upon a pair of garters—it was their very first lesson in that art, and the novelty and the importance of the event fascinated them for the time being.

On hearing the door open, Mrs. Brunton looked up from her work, and in some surprise arose to receive her visitor.

"This is a young lady that has come to see us, mother; her name is Genevieve."

"Come to the fire, miss, you must have had a bad walk of it this morning."

"Oh! no, the snow was fast frozen, and I skimmed over it dry shod—look," said Vivia, smiling, and pointing down to a pair of feet clad in white lamb's-wool stockings, that had been drawn over her shoes, and looked quite worthy of the immaculate cleanliness of the widow's cottage floor.

"Why they *do* look as if they had just stepped out of a glass-case, sure enough—and so do *you*, too, my dear, for that matter, look just the same, I'm sure," she added, in sincere flattery, as she placed her own chair for the little girl.

As soon as Vivia had sat down, the two children dropped their knitting and came up to her, and won by her bright smile, got down on the floor, one each side of her, and put their hands on her lap, and admired her cloak, and seemed to like to touch her, while she caressed and talked to them

—leisurely, seeming to be in no haste to speak her errand at the cabin.

"Now don't be forward, children—you worry the young lady. Don't let them bother you, they are troublesome little things to any body they take a fancy to, miss," said Mrs. Brunton.

"I am very glad if they like me. Pray don't make a stranger of me. I am not a young lady, and don't like to be called miss."

"Why, la! why?"

"I don't think it has a sweet, friendly sound—it seems to put me away from you," said Vivia, smiling ingenuously.

"Why, darling, that is the very last thing I would want to do—though I never saw your bright, kind face before!" exclaimed the woman, whose heart seemed to be completely captivated by the radiant creature.

"Oh, I hope so. Well! I came here because I had long wanted to come, and because this morning our Mother wanted a messenger—for Sister Angela is sick, and Brother Peter is at an age now that makes him love his arm-chair by the little stove in his porter's lodge, better than a winter morning's walk. Our Mother sends her love to you, and begs you to come up to the Convent as soon as you can conveniently—to-morrow or next day, she said would do—for she requires your assistance about some work; and she begs you will take *this* for her sake," concluded the little girl, rising and putting a small packet into the hands of the widow, and closing the fingers so that neither of them saw what it was.

"I thank her very much, my dear, for I have had no work for many weeks, and was in a straight place, though no one knew it. Does the Abbess ever have game for her table, dear?"

"No, indeed! where should she get it? You don't think the Sisters would go a gunning, do you? And as for Bro-

ther Peter, at the gate, I don't suppose he has fired a gun for forty years. No! indeed, in the two years that I have spent at the Convent, I have never seen such a thing."

"Well, dear, I shall be very glad to send the Abbess a bunch of partridges, and a rabbit or so, every week while they are in season, for the love I have for her."

"You are very good-hearted, I am sure, and I thank you much for our Mother. I know she will be very glad to have them, for dear Angela is so ill, and has no relish for any thing we can offer her—and that might tempt her appetite."

"Now, dear, if you are rested, give me your cloak and hood, you must not sit in them."

"Oh, they are both in one," said the girl, rising and turning off the only outside garment she ever wore, and revealing a brilliant, massy-hued, plaid worsted dress, with a little black silk apron, and a tiny white linen ruffle around her neck. The glittering spiral ringlets of her bright brown hair clustered very thickly around her head, but reached only down to her neck. Her new appearance awoke the little children's admiration afresh, and when she sat down again, they came and played with her dress and with her hair, and then again with her dress, and asked her if she wouldn't get them one *like* it. And Vivia told them "Yes," she would —although it was a promise made in faith alone, for at that time she certainly did not see her way very clearly through to the keeping of it.

"Now, really, little folks, you shall not be so troublesome," said their mother, attempting to withdraw them.

"Oh, Vivia likes us mother, she ain't plagued at all," said Annie.

"So she does," exclaimed the subject of these disputes, drawing the little black-headed creatures closer to her side. Then she began to tell them of the Orphan Asylum and the School, and the children there, and the Sisters that took care of them.

At that moment, Wakefield, who had been out in the garden trimming trees, came in, and reported the snow to be thawing so fast that the roads would soon be in a dreadful state. Vivia arose and took her cloak to put it on to depart. Mrs. Brunton, after going to the door, and looking out, said,

"The snow is melting so fast that the paths will soon be running rills. Don't think of going now, dear. Stay and spend the day, and we will give you a partridge pie for dinner. And toward evening the ground will freeze again, and Wakefield will wait upon you home."

"Oh, I should love to stay indeed; and at the Convent they have so much trust in my being able to take care of myself, that they would not be uneasy," said Vivia, laying down her cloak again.

"Oh, Wake! what do you think? Vivia says that when the spring opens, we can go to school to *her*," said Annie.

"Will the young lady take *me*, too, Annie?" asked Wakefield, smiling, and glancing at Vivia.

"No—they don't take boys at the Convent."

"I am very sorry that they don't, Wakefield, I am sure. I think there *ought* to be a free-school for boys in this neighborhood, and I hope there will be in time."

"I hope so, too, for the sake of others; but if it is not soon, it will be of no use to me, Miss Genevieve, for I am nearly thirteen years old, and cannot read."

"And is there no one of your friends that would teach you?"

"No, for all my intimate acquaintances know how much I long to learn, because I have never made a secret of it, yet no one has ever volunteered to take the trouble of teaching me."

"Then I will teach you, if you will permit me."

"No! will you, though?"

"Yes, indeed, if you will let me."

"But won't it be a great deal of trouble to you?"

"No, indeed! On the contrary, it will be a very great pleasure, Wakefield."

"I wonder, though, if it will? teaching is said to be such a trying task!"

"It won't be in this case, with such a willing teacher and such an anxious learner."

"Ah, when may I begin! but that is such a selfish question, too."

"Have you any thing pressing to do this morning?"

"Nothing in the world—which is not my fault—seeing that I would work if I could find work."

"Well, then, there never will be such a good time for beginning to learn to read as now. So we will commence. But, will our lesson disturb *you*, Mrs. Brunton?"

"No, my dear child, it will delight me; Heaven bless you!"

"What books have you got in the house, Wakefield?"

"Nothing but the Bible—and we can't read that, either—but we keep it for the love of it, you know!"

"Well, get it, and we will go off there by the window, and a boy of your age and quickness can learn all the letters on the title-page in an hour."

Vivia drew her chair up to the east window; and Wakefield brought his duodecimo Bible, and drawing another chair by his side, began to receive his first lesson.

"In a few years from this now, Wakefield, it will be *you* who will be able to teach me, you know; because there is no limit to a boy's learning, if he once gets a start, with the will to it that *you* have; while a girl seldom or never gets beyond a certain point," she said, encouragingly.

And while the widow called the children to her side, resumed her chair and her work, and their lesson in garter-knitting, Wakefield entered upon the thorny path of know-

ledge, led by a fairer, brighter guide than ever attended poor ambitious student.

So an hour passed quietly, and then the little ones, who had grown tired of their lesson, became very restless, and were strongly attracted to the window where the boy and his girl-teacher sat. And notwithstanding the frequent admonitions of their mother, made so many impromptu visits thither, as to seriously interrupt Wakefield's studies; until at length Vivia took from her pocket a little book full of pictures, which she gave them to go away with.

Thus the remainder of the forenoon passed. The mother got dinner more quietly than ever a dinner was got before. And around the little meal there was a brisk and lively talk, in compensation for the silence that had been previously. Wakefield was full of confidence and enthusiasm, and declared his belief that he should learn to read any book in a fortnight, that is, if he could have his lessons regularly.

"I'll tell you what I have been thinking of, Wakefield. There's Brother Peter, who sits all day long in his arm-chair, over his little stove in the porter's lodge, with nothing in the world to do. His office is a perfect sinecure; for by our Mother's orders, the gate is never locked. I'm sure his only uneasiness is in having nothing to occupy him—perhaps you, who are so active and industrious, don't know what that feeling is."

"Oh, don't I, though, these long winter evenings!—it is enough to make any body do something desperate, it is!"

"Well, now, I know that it would be a great blessing to Brother Peter to have something interesting to do regularly; and nothing could be more interesting than to teach such an earnest student as you, Wakefield."

"Oh, would he do it, do you think? would he do it every day?"

"I am quite sure he would; to teach one pupil is a very light task, indeed, where he is as anxious to learn, and as

quick as you are. And I am very certain that Brother Peter would be much livelier for having it to do."

"Oh, I should be so happy! it would be like—I was just agoing to say the kingdom of Heaven—so it would!"

"Well, Wakefield, I promise you faithfully that you shall have the opportunity. I will see and speak to Brother Peter, to-morrow morning. And to-morrow, as soon as you have done waiting on your mother, you come up to the Convent and see the result."

Wakefield expressed his satisfaction in the most exaggerated, yet withal, the most sincere terms; for with all his real gratitude to Vivia, he had reasons for preferring the instructions of Brother Peter; he did not wish to give Vivia too much trouble, and he had rather receive regular instructions from a man, than interrupted lessons from a little girl.

After dinner, as the boy's zeal was unabated, Vivia proposed to resume her teaching. And, with a little hesitation, lest he should tire her patience, Wakefield consented. The short afternoon soon passed. As the widow had predicted, toward evening it turned very cold, and the ground began to freeze. And then Vivia wrapped herself in her scarlet cloak to depart. And Wakefield put on a great coat that was a queer misnomer, being much too *small!*

"You needn't go with me, Wakefield. There is no reason why you should walk all the way to the Convent, and then have to come all the way back to-night, when it will be much colder than it is now. I know the best paths so well that there will be no danger; besides, Fido will take care of me, and we shall get home before it is quite dark."

But neither Wakefield nor his mother would take this view, and they looked so unhappy that Vivia at last consented that the boy should attend her. She then kissed the children, shook hands with their mother, received her

promise to come to the Abbess the next day, and attended by Wakefield and her faithful dog, set out for home.

Down the mountain-path, whose very ruggedness was now a help, inasmuch as it kept them from slipping and falling until they reached the bottom; and along under the shelter of the mountain on their left hand, with Mad River at a short distance on their right, until they came in sight of Red Ridge farm-house; past that until they came to the part of their path where the river neared the ridge, and then up the rising ground and through the woods, until the trees grew thinner and larger, when they came to the open space that lay below the Convent wall, and saw the group of its red buildings, with the mountains rising behind.

It was not quite dark when they passed the gate. Vivia conducted the lad up to the house, and invited him to enter, and sit and warm himself at the hall stove, while she left him for a few minutes.

When she returned, she brought a new spelling book and a red comforter. She put the book in the boy's hands, and wrapped the comforter around his neck, and, smiling, told him that he wore her colors then, and was her knight, and she enjoined him, for her sake, to distinguish himself—not in the sanguinary fields of battle, but in the bloodless field of letters. And she knew the boy understood her well; for he had beguiled their wintry walk with a tale of chivalry his mother had related to him. But he looked half-pleased and half-confused, as a boy of thirteen should, and said he would do his very best, and then making his bow, took leave and departed.

The next morning early Vivia came out of the Convent, and tripping along down the straight avenue of locust trees, that led from the main entrance to the great gate, reached the porter's lodge.

It was a small building of reddish granite, to the left of the gate, with one door, window and chimney, and one

denizen. Vivia rapped, and hearing a growling "Come in," lifted the latch and entered.

It was a small den, some twelve feet square, furnished with a carpet, a stove, a table, two chairs, and a recess, with a bed and a little stand, with a crucifix.

Brother Peter, a little, ordinary old man, in a black gown and black cap, was sitting in his leathern arm-chair, which filled the space between the window and the stove, and early as it was, appeared to be dozing as he stooped over the fire. As Vivia closed the door behind her, he looked up and smiled brightly, and exclaimed, cordially,

"*Benedicite*, my child! is it you? Come, bring that other chair and sit up to the stove."

"Thank you, Brother Peter," said Vivia, doing as she was bid.

"Are you pretty well, Brother Peter, to-day?"

"Always well, I thank Heaven, my child."

"Is there any thing that would make you more comfortable here, Brother Peter?"

"Nothing, my child, I have every thing I need, and have nothing left to ask for myself—but the grace of God!" said the old man, reverently lifting his cap.

"Well, Brother Peter, I have come this morning to ask a favor of you, for the love of the Lord."

"And what is that, my daughter?"

"There is a poor boy—a very intelligent boy, who is very anxious to learn to read; it is a great pity he should not be able to go to school; but his mother is a great deal too poor to send him to a pay school, and there is no free school for boys about here—I wish there was."

"So do I, my child. Well, what boy is it?"

"It is Wakefield Brunton, the son of that poor widow that lives at the Gray Rock cabin."

"Oh! Ay! Well, my child, and what can *I* do?"

"Why, I came to ask you, if you could not receive that

boy here for an hour, or two hours, just as you like, every day, to teach him to read?"

Brother Peter did not reply. And Vivia's face grew anxious and animated.

"Think, Brother Peter, of the great blessing you might be to that boy by teaching him to read; he is quite an uncommon boy, and if he can only get 'the keys of knowledge,' as the simple rudiments are called—he will then open the temple and explore it for himself. Well, Brother Peter?"

"Well, my daughter, you know it is an unusual sort of thing that you propose, and it has taken me by surprise, that is all. But I dare say it is right, and a good work. I'll think about it."

"But won't you *try* it, Brother Peter? You will never know how it will work unless you *do* try it, and then if you do not like it, you needn't go on. Now this morning you looked very lonesome when I came in. Wakefield will be here in a few minutes—now will you please to let him sit here with you for one hour and learn his lesson."

"Well, my child, I don't see any great thing, one way or the other, in his sitting here and getting his lesson," said slow Brother Peter.

"And then will you answer any questions he asks you about it?"

"Well! there is not much in that, either. Yes, my child."

"Thank you, Brother Peter; you have made me very happy!"

"Me! I made you very happy, my child!" exclaimed the old man, with vivacity; "why, it is nothing; and if it really makes you very happy, why, I'd do a great deal to make you so!"

"Oh, here is the boy just coming through the gate," said Vivia, looking out at the window, and then starting up and

going out to intercept Wakefield, who was about to pass the lodge on his way up to the Convent.

In a moment she returned, followed by the boy, whom she introduced, by saying,

"Brother Peter, this is Wakefield Brunton, who is coming to school to you."

"Good-morning, Wakefield," said the old man, holding out his hand, in a friendly manner, and adding, as he noticed the boy's fine, earnest, intelligent countenance, "Yes, we will try it a little while, Wakefield, if it is only to please Miss Genevieve."

"Come, Wakefield, to the stove, and get a good warming, and then we will arrange your studying-chair."

"Oh, Miss Genevieve, indeed!" began the lad, deprecatingly.

But Vivia interrupted him.

"When will your mother be up here, Wakefield?"

"Not till the afternoon. She can't leave the children alone, and so she cannot come till I get home."

"That will be time enough. Now, Wakefield, here is a little table that has been standing ever since it was made, only for show. You can use it. Draw your chair up to it, now, and let me see you comfortably at work before I go. At noon, Wakefield, you are not to think of going all the way home without having your dinner; so you are to come up with Brother Peter to the Convent, and dine with him. Our Mother knows of it, and there will be a slate and copy-book left in the refectory for you.—Hush, Wakefield! you are not to make any objection, for you wear your liege lady's colors, and are bound to mind her!"

"Liege lady's colors?" questioned Brother Peter, looking in dull perplexity from one to the other.

"Yes, Brother Peter! This is the Knight of the Crimson Comforter! I have signed him with a sign, and I have bound him with a spell!"

"Yes, you young people will have your jokes! Well, it's pardonable at your age."

"Never mind! be careful of your health, dear Brother Peter, and though you are sixty years old, you may yet live to see the day when it will be your proudest boast to say, 'Why, I, *I*, children, old Peter Vanheimer, taught that man his rudiments!'" said Vivia, smiling playfully, as she made Wakefield draw the little table into the line of light from the window, take his seat at it, and open his book. "I shall put in a claim for a share of Brother Peter's future boast, too, Wakefield," she added, as she went over his lesson once with him before leaving him to the care of Brother Peter. Then, smiling, she bade them good-by, and returned to the house.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CONVENT'S CHILD.

"She was not very beautiful, if it be beauty's test
To match the classic model—when perfectly at rest.

* * * * *

Said I she was not beautiful? Her eyes upon your sight
Broke with the lambent purity of planetary light;
And an intellectual glory, like a lamp within a vase
Lit up every feature of her animated face."

When Vivia reached the Convent, she went immediately to the right wing, occupied by the young ladies academy, in the senior class of which she was a pupil. But the time of recess had come, and merely stopping to report herself to her teacher, and hand in the written permit by which the Abbess had sanctioned her temporary absence, she joined her companions in the recreation room.

"Dear Genevieve, I am so glad to see you!" said a little

girl, coming forward and putting her arms around Vivia, "where have you been so long?"

"As soon as my lessons are over I go into the orphan school, where I have the infant class since Sister Angela has been ill."

"And yesterday? I saw your red cloak fluttering in and out among the trees as you went from the gate, and watched it until it was out of sight in the thick of the woods."

"I went an errand to a poor widow, as Sister Angela was sick and could not go."

"Ah, Genevieve?" said the other, "if you knew how much I love you! It is almost a pity for any poor little thing like me to love one like you so dearly! but I do so much! And when you are gone I grow cold and stupid and dull as a stone," said the little girl, with her arms still clasped around Vivia's waist, as she stood before her, with her head thrown back, and her large, loving brown eyes raised almost in adoration to the bright, young face that was smiling down on hers.

"Dull! *you* dull, Theodora! that is impossible! you only get tired. You will get the medal in your class another year!"

"Ah! if *you* were with me, Genevieve, I could! but when you leave me, I grow stupid!"

"*You* grow stupid! impossible! You must not believe such a thing!" said Vivia, smiling down upon the animated countenance that was raised so lovingly to hers.

And in truth a great change had come over the little shrinking Theodora, in the time that she had been associated with the bright, inspiring Vivia. It was hard to recognize her in the animated, ardent girl before us. Theodora had never been removed from the Convent; but had been transferred, at her aunt's expense, from the orphan asylum department to the young lady's academy, and there for one

year she had, with the willing aid of Vivia, pursued her studies very successfully. You may see from what has just passed, with what a strong, passionate attachment she clung to Vivia. Now she coaxed Genevieve away to a distant part of the room, where they sat and talked until a Lay Sister came in and said that a visitor in the parlor desired to see Miss Shelley, and that the Mother Superior requested that she would come immediately.

"Good-by then, dear Genevieve; I suppose now I shall not see you until to-morrow!"

So saying, Theodora went reluctantly from the room, feeling full sure that the visitor was no other than her dashing aunt Maria, Mrs. Thogmorton, of whom she was always afraid.

She left by a back door of the academy, crossed the court-yard, and by a back door of the cloister entered the central hall, and thence into the Abbess's parlor.

And aunt Maria the visitor proved to be. She was a tall, finely formed, dark haired, dark eyed, high complexioned woman, between thirty-five and forty years of age, very richly and tastefully dressed, and altogether a woman to command more coarse admiration than sincere respect or real affection. She was sitting on the sofa by the Abbess.

"Come here, my dear—how do you do?" she said, holding out her hand to Theodora. The little girl advanced and took the proffered hand—rather coldly—and then let it go and sat down. "I hope you have improved the time you have been here, Theodora; it is one year, you know; you might have got a good common education in that time! and and I truly hope you have."

"I think I have done my very best, aunt Maria; and my teachers say they are satisfied with me."

"Oh, yes, I know teachers say that when you escape disgrace; but knowing your circumstances, Theodora, you should have done much better than that, and I hope you

have done so, as your quarter is up the last of this week, and I am under the necessity of removing you from the school."

"Removing me from the school!" exclaimed the child, in dismay.

"Yes, Theodora, and when you are older, and know more of life, you will understand that you have been very fortunate in your orphan state in getting a year of schooling. *I* never was more fortunate."

"Yet I do wish I could stay until I had completed the—"

"That cannot be, Theodora! We have a large family to support and educate, and have already gone to more expense than we feel quite justified in going to."

"When am I to leave, aunt Maria?"

"Your quarter will be up the last of this week. You will leave Saturday, that is the day after to-morrow. I will call for you in the afternoon of that day. Come, come, Theodora, don't go to crying; that is very foolish and ungrateful in you!" said the lady, impatiently, as she saw the tears swell to the child's eyes.

Theodora also felt that it must seem very foolish and ungrateful to weep at the thought of leaving school for home; she was sure she had never seen any other girl do so; they were always grateful and glad; but she could not help it at thought of going away from the school were she had found peace, and from Vivia, who was the angel of her young life, to that uncle's house of which she remembered nothing but domestic discord and terror, or neglect, privation, and all sorts of misery, and her tears broke forth afresh."

"I am very sorry indeed, miss, to see you exhibit so bad a temper!" said Mrs. Thogmorton severely, for she sincerely mistook the emotion of the child.

Theodora would have wished to say that it was not anger, it was grief that made her weep, but even if the suffocation

in her throat had not made it impossible for her to speak, her natural shyness and timidity would prevent her, as it ever did, from making herself understood. Mrs. Thogmorton then explained to the Abbess that the doctor had leased Mount Storm for a term of years from Mrs. Malmaison, who was going to the city for the present, for the sake of affording her son Austin better opportunities of education than could be procured for him here. The Abbess changed color, but did not otherwise testify any interest. The visitor further added that Mrs. Malmaison had just purchased more land very cheaply at the Sunset Hills, and contemplated building there. And soon after she arose to depart, saying that by two o'clock on Saturday afternoon, her carriage should be in waiting for Theodora.

When her aunt had gone, the child went back to the recreation-room in the faint hope of seeing Vivia again, but the recess was over, the room vacant, and the pupils all in their several class-rooms. A dull, unhappy afternoon, a troubled night, and an anxious morning intervened, and then at the recess hour Theodora met with Genevieve again.

"Oh, Genevieve, I am going to leave you," she said, throwing her arms around Vivia's neck and bursting into tears.

"I know it, Theodora, but be comforted, for I shall come to see you very often."

"Oh, will you, Genevieve? but it is so far."

"I can walk it."

"And then you don't know aunt Maria."

"I'll make her acquaintance for your sake! Come, cheer up! Your aunt is going to live at Mount Storm! It is a glorious old place. You must be happy there. I shall come very often, and when the spring fairly opens we shall have fine times in that old terraced garden, and rambling over the mountain and down by the course of the cataract and the river; how many mineral specimens we can collect;

how many new, wild flowers; and how many beautiful sketches we can make! Come, cheer up!"

Indeed there was no resisting the animating influence of that bright creature. The look of Vivia upon the pale, sad face of Theodora was like the sunshine striking the rain-cloud—and the child smiled back brightly through her tears.

"Why, with all those inspiring influences around you, you will become an artist, Theodora."

"Oh! if I *could* draw well! If I could draw your dear, *dear* face, Vivia!"

"You will paint my portrait some time!"

"Oh! do you think so, Genevieve? how happy that would make me if I could believe it!"

"Be *sure* that you will! and not only my portrait, but pictures! oh! such pictures! Shut your eyes and see if you don't see them!"

"Oh, Genevieve, you know I want to paint every thing I love and admire. First of all your dear face, and then those I read of in history—oh! how my heart does burn to paint Sir William Wallace standing before his judges! And when I see a beautiful, heavenly sunset! oh! it warms my heart, and I feel so happy—so happy as if the whole heavens were pouring into my soul at once, and I want to fix the beauty where I can see it forever; how I *wish* I could draw well!"

"You must work hard and be patient, and not be discouraged at your failures, and by-and-by you will be able to paint the beautiful things that are in your mind. And as you get older, more beautiful things will come there, and you will also be quite able to produce them."

"Oh, how I wish in the time that I have been here that the Sisters would have let me take regular drawing lessons. But no! they wouldn't; they said I must study the solid

branches first—*only* solid branches! And oh! *how* solid grammar and arithmetic are!"

"The Sisters see no difference, nor make any difference in the training of the pupils—they are all under one discipline, as if their minds were to be put in uniform as well as their bodies. But never mind, I will still help you."

"Dear Genevieve, no one has ever helped me half so much. Every one but my grandmother always said that I was a dunce; and I thought it was true, too, and that grandmother did not tell me so only because she was fond of her poor Theodora, and didn't want to give her pain. And at the school here, too, they all said I was a dullard, and I believed it, and grew duller every day, and every thing I did was either blamed or ridiculed until you came, and then all was changed—somehow you woke me up and set me right—how was it, Genevieve?"

"Indeed I don't know, Theodora; I only told you the truth about yourself and cheered you up—I imagine that's all."

"Oh! more than that—you warmed my poor little chilled heart, and brightened my mind—why even now, when you go away, I grow cold and dull, though never so much so as when you found me. Don't leave me long to myself, bright Genevieve."

"I won't, dear, I will often come to see you since you like to have me—and I like to be with you. The school-bell is ringing! Now then," said Vivia, kissing her protege, and leaving her smiling.

The afternoon of the next day, Mrs. Thogmorton called in her carriage to take Theodora away. While she was resting in the parlor, and Theodora sat with her, Genevieve asked permission to come in and take leave of her friend. And this being granted she entered, and was introduced by Theodora to her aunt. The bright, animating girl could not fail to make a happy impression even upon a worldling

like Mrs. Thogmorton, and she inspired that lady with such unwonted benevolence and good humor, that as she arose to depart, she said,

"Really, my dear, I shall be very glad to have you come to Mount Storm, and spend some time with us, when we get settled. Let me see—this is mid-lent—well! by the Easter holidays we shall be fixed; come then, and spend a week with your friend."

"Thank you, Mrs. Thogmorton. I shall love to come; but wouldn't it be very selfish in me to wait until all your moving trouble is over? Won't you let me come *any time* between this and Easter, and help you about arranging the rooms—our Mother says that I am good at that."

"Very well, my dear, we shall be the happier the sooner we see you. We commence moving on Monday, and hope to get all the household furniture over, and be at home in our new residence, if not quite settled, by Thursday evening."

"Very well, then; Theodora, do you hear? Friday evening after school, I shall come over to Mount Storm, and stay and make myself generally useful until Monday morning," said Vivia to the little girl, whose eyes were full of tears.

"Come, come, my love," said Mrs. Thogmorton, kindly taking the hand of her niece, "you must not grieve so. I know it is very painful for you to part with your young friend, who is more like a sister than any thing else to you; but you hear her say that she will come on Friday, and we shall all be happy to see her, I am sure."

"Vivia, will you be sure to come?" asked Theodora, tearfully.

"Yes, I will assuredly."

Then Theodora embraced Vivia, who smiled encouragingly upon her, bidding her be good and cheerful. And so the aunt and niece departed—Mrs. Thogmorton in a more kindly mood than Theodora had ever known her.

CHAPTER XV.

THE OLD FARM-HOUSE.

Oh, bright is that home when the spring-time returns,
And brighter than all when the evening fire burns;
When the snow falls without, and the comfort within
Tells the time when the pleasures of winter begin.—*Mrs. Ellis.*

THERE was trouble at Red Ridge. Well, that was nothing new. There always *had* been trouble there, ever since the soil was first settled by the Wildmans—I had liked to have written it the Wildmen. Names were first given to denote the leading characteristic of the recipients; but in the course of generations, through marriage and other modifying circumstances, such characteristics have a great tendency to run out, and family names quite a wonderful proclivity to become laughable misnomers; thus, I know of Cravens, who are by no means remarkable for cowardice; Savages in a high state of civilization and refinement; Lambs whose tempers I would not like to provoke; Lions who are not dangerous brutes; Hawks who do not prey upon their weak neighbors; and, vice versa; to say nothing of brunette Whites and Blond Browns, and Bakers in every other business but the old legitimate one that probably gave them their name. To return.

There must have been a remarkable power of endurance in that quality that gave the Wildman family their cognomen, since that was as appropriate in the nineteenth century as it might have been in the ninth, or in any other when it was first conferred. Wild men they were known to be as far as they were known at all. Reckless extravagance had made them homeless adventurers in their own country, and

finally driven them to this. In every generation they regularly ruined themselves, and then, by a fortunate marriage, or a prize in the lottery, or an unexpected legacy, came up all right again—for these wild men were almost universal favorites, not because they regularly wasted their substance in entertaining and feasting their friends and acquaintances —for many others, from Timon down, have done that, and got little thanks—but that, in addition to their hospitable qualities, they possessed other highly popular social gifts, such as unfailing good spirits, a contagious mirthfulness, wit, humor, etc., with the absence of others, such as offensive pride, ostentation, and ill-temper, that might have neutralized all the foregoing.

It was not possible that, with such courses, the family should not have degenerated as much in person and in intellect as in wealth, social influence and power, and that, in successive generations, every plunge into ruin should not be deeper, and every recovery fainter.

So that the last lineal descendant, the poor boy, Basil Wildman, was not only the poorest of all his line, but he was also the dullest in intellect, and the plainest in personal appearance. He was still a minor, being but eighteen years of age, and though both his parents were dead, there was no particular reason why he should hurry himself to attain his legal majority, since there was nothing to inherit, not even the home of his forefathers, for that had been lost to the late Colonel Malmaison by the foreclosure of a mortgage upon the Red Ridge estate, held by that gentleman; and the heir was only a tenant at will in the home of his ancestors.

He would not have been there at all, in any capacity, had it not been for the business talent, energy, industry and perseverance of his grandmother, little old Mrs. Wildman, who having been a girl of humble parentage, and brought up with habits of labor and frugality, had for a long time

averted ruin from the house; and at last, when a spendthrift son, following in the footsteps of a spendthrift husband, had completed the household wreck, by mortgaging the farm, breaking the heart of his wife, and drinking himself to death, it did not crush this woman of great but unpretending excellence, who left the grave of her last son, in her old age, to begin the world again for the sake of her grandchildren, Basil and Helen.

The mortgage had been foreclosed; but to purchase back the homestead at the sum for which it had been sacrificed was within the bounds of possibility. She had gone to Colonel Malmaison, who was not a hard hearted man, and had rented the farm of Red Ridge at an annual rate much below its value for a certain term of years. She had also obtained from him the verbal promise that she should have the opportunity of repurchasing the homestead at the price of the principal and interest of the sum for which it had been mortgaged. With so much to hope, she had returned home and commenced operations. She had taken every thing about the place under her own control. With the help of three or four able-bodied negroes that belonged to the soil, and the assistance of Brunton, since deceased, and of the boy Blaise also, when not at school, she had worked the farm, and worked it well, with such a judicious system, and such success, that year after year her barn had been filled to overflowing; and this, together with the wise economy practiced in the family, had enabled her to save money, and to anticipate, at no distant day, the repurchase of the farm, when the death of Colonel Malmaison struck a nearly fatal blow to her hopes; for even if she could amass the necessary sum for the purpose, she, at sixty years of age, could not confidently expect to live to see the day of young Austin's majority, when the heir should be in a legal condition to transfer any part of his late father's estate. Still, there *was* a chance that she might live so long, or

even twice as long, for she was hale, and she was regular and moderate in all her habits; so why should she not attain the age of seventy, eighty, or even ninety?

So she continued to hope, and to work, and to save with untiring zeal, to leave a homestead to her grandchildren; rising always with the earliest dawn of day and going out to see the field hands at work, and superintending all the business of the farm, seeing that the hands did their duty, and that the labor was all properly and faithfully performed.

Still, though upon the whole things went rather prosperously with the old lady, she had some serious drawbacks, and one pre-eminent source of anxiety; that was in poor Blaise. Carefully as she had tried to train him rightly, nature was so much stronger than education, that as Blaise grew up into an awkward, red-headed hobble-de-hoy, he began to manifest a natural antipathy to work, and a strong proclivity towards idleness, company, and fun in general.

She combated these tendencies as wisely and as well as she could. Yet, one day, when returning at noon from the field, where she had spent several hours under a burning August sun, overseeing her hands stacking the rye, in passing near the barn, she heard a voice roar out—

"All four honors, and six tricks, by the hokey!"

Following the sound and entering the barn, she found Blaise seated with his cousin Nelly, and his friend Wake Brunton, playing three-handed whist ("or some other horrid game," she said,) with a bottle of molasses and water in the midst! Now, nothing could exceed the old lady's horror of cards and bottles—and, indeed, poor woman, she had had reason sufficient to hate and fear both. And after the death of her last son, she had made a funeral pile of all the cards in the house, and had locked up all the bottles in a disused garret closet, and would not put one of the latter even to the innocent use of filling it with milk or coffee for Basil's school-dinner, for fear it might suggest bad

thoughts in his head. And after all—now! The old lady's sudden burst of tears startled the little card party.

Helen jumped up and ran away, oversetting in her flight the bottle of molasses and water.

Wakefield rose quickly, picked up his ragged cap, and blushing up to his eyes, made a shy, deprecating jerk of his head intended for a bow, and slunk away with an intense feeling of mortification at being detected in such unlawful orgies, and with a violent impulse to run also, only he felt that it would be disrespectful to the old lady, and cowardly in himself.

Blaise stood his ground, with his stiff, coarse red hair bristled up like a halo all around his forehead—this was not the effect of terror, but of a natural gift his hair had of quilling up in that way, and of a habit he had when surprised or perplexed, of pushing it up so. At his grandmother's tearful demand, he yielded up the contraband goods—the cards and bottle, and walked before her to the house, where she administered a severe lecture, that made him cry and promise to work in the field all that afternoon, and all the remainder of the holidays, too; but beyond that, produced no great or lasting effect.

There were two other inmates of the house; and of these, the "first in honor as in place," was Miss Wildman, or Miss Elizabeth, as she was generally called, a maiden lady near fifty years of age, sister to the late husband of old Mrs. Wildman. The negroes left on the plantation belonged to her; they had been her share of the patrimony—though they now worked for the benefit of the whole family. And it was well for all parties, that in the division of the estates these had fallen to Elizabeth Wildman, instead of either of her brothers, in which case they must certainly have shared the same fate of their companions on the farm, and fallen by an execution under the auctioneer's hammer. Miss Elizabeth probably inherited the qualities of her mother's family,

who were people of such cultivation and refinement, that it is still a traditional wonder how one of their race ever could have fancied one of the Wildmans. But "love is the one grand caprice of nature." Miss Elizabeth was, as all the country people said, "every inch a lady." With her, family pride, and wealth and consequence was an innocent illusion, that sometimes really looked beautiful. The utmost malice of fate could never make her feel that "the family" were really poor and fallen, or that she herself was not quite rich enough to be the lady bountiful of her neighborhood. Often when they could not afford loaf sugar for their own tea, she would send old port wine, bought for the purpose from the druggist at Eyrie, to some poor sick neighbor for whom it had been prescribed, or do some similar act of rather extravagant bounty. "When limes is so *scace*, too!" as poor old Mrs. Wildman would groan to herself—though she did not venture to use one word of expostulation with Miss Elizabeth, of whom she stood in a sort of traditional awe, as having come of an "old family!" Miss Elizabeth looked upon her humble, hard-working sister-in-law, who kept the family roof over all their heads, as rather a good sort of low person—who used very ungrammatical language, though never unfriendly words, and often offended against etiquette, though never against good feeling. She not only tolerated but loved her for the many excellent qualities that she fully acknowledged her to possess; and she had excused her brother's marriage with this humble creature, not only upon account of her numerous virtues, but also by recalling to mind all the princes of the blood, and peers of the realm she had read of in her old romances, who had married peasant girls. I suppose such laughable family pride does not exist anywhere else except in Ireland. Still she always treated her sister-in-law with the utmost kindness and consideration, and would not upon any account, have betrayed the fact that she remembered the obscurity of her origin, or

noticed the ungrammatical style of her conversation. Miss Elizabeth had once been a very pretty woman, and was now, at fifty, a very pleasing one. She was tall and thin, with a fair, placid face, hazy blue eyes, and silver hair smoothly parted under the transparent folds of a white muslin turban; her long, thin, withered hands were very white and soft, and "lady like," and she was rather careful of them too. Miss Elizabeth always maintained a sort of state, about herself, her dress, and her conversation. And though her every-day gown was but a ten-cent calico, it was chosen for its tiny, almost invisible pattern, and its grave, quiet hue; for if she must wear a low priced fabric, it must not be of mixed colors or visible pattern—and it was always made up with extreme plainness, and worn with a certain air of dignity that might have become a real Genoa velvet at the very least. Her turban too, though it was made of a yard of shilling book-muslin, was always got up with exquisite neatness, and fastened with a gold pin—her only jewel. Miss Elizabeth was the skillful and untiring seamstress for the whole family, and made and mended their clothing, and pieced up a fabulous number of wonderful bed-quilts, mostly kept only for exhibition. And if ever in bending over her sewing, she got a pain in her back, and a suspicion in her head that she was a *drudge*, she scouted the idea, and quickly consoled herself by recalling to mind the prodigies of needlework performed by great ladies in those good old times, when, as she was fond of saying—"In spite of reverses of fortune, ladies were always ladies."

The remaining inmate of the house was a very different person from all the rest. Her name was Nelly Parrott. She claimed to be a distant relation of the Wildmans, and her claim was admitted by the kind-hearted family, though the relationship was so *very* distant, that no one, not even the great mistress of genealogy, Miss Elizabeth herself, could tell wherein it consisted. Miss Nelly Parrott had

been received into the house at the instance of Blaise Wildman's father, who offered her a home partly from pity that no one else would take her in, and partly from the fact that he found in her an inexhaustible fund of amusement. I am inclined to think that there was some truth in Miss Nelly Parrott's claim of kinship with the Wildmans, and that the family eccentricities had found their culminating point in her so-called insanity; for Miss Nelly was said to be crazy, although there was always "method in her madness," and often wit or wisdom in her wildest words and acts.

Miss Nelly was the perpetual butt and victim of *our* little Nell, who by the way utterly and indignantly repudiated her claim of relationship, and fell into a fury when any one asked her if *she*, Helen Wildman, were named after her "Aunt Nelly Parrott!" The severest and the most effectual rebuke that could possibly be administered to little Nell, was to tell her that she "took after Miss Nelly Parrott." It was always enough to make her a model young lady for a whole day.

Miss Nelly Parrott was about forty years of age, she was a short and thick-set person, with a large, round head, covered with red hair, that she said was "the family hair," and which she kept cut short enough to wear in frizzled curls that made her head look twice its natural size, and more like an enormous tow-mop than any thing else. She had faded blue eyes, and a fat, fair, freckled face, which it was her favorite vanity to doctor with all the lotions, washes, powders, creams, and all other cosmetics that she could beg, borrow, or otherwise "*annex.*"

Besides this, she was immensely fond of finery, and a faded scarf, or dress, or ribbon, a piece of half-worn lace, or crushed artificial flowers, or broken ostrich feathers, were always most acceptable presents to her, especially when they happened to be "sky blue," or "pea green," or "violet purple," all of which colors Miss Nelly said suited her "style."

As she was a sort of public beneficiary, and as all the country neighbors knew her tastes, and liked to delight her at so small a cost as the cast-off finery that even the negroes had too much self-respect to bedizen themselves with, many were the presents that Miss Nelly received, and various as numerous were the articles of her wardrobe, and astonishing was the effect of her daily toilet, and stupendous the sensation created by her full dress for Sundays and festivals.

It was in vain that Mrs. Wildman bought good cheap calicos, and that Miss Elizabeth offered to make them up for her, she would not wear them, she would not even look at them. In vain also was the kind remonstrance of Mrs. Wildman, who finding her one wintry Sabbath decked out in strange style for church, ventured to say,

"Indeed, Nelly, if I were you, I *would* have a little more respect for myself than to wear Mrs. Thogmorton's old sky blue gauze to church this morning."

To which Miss Nelly replied, tossing her head—

"And indeed, Mrs. Wildman, it is not to be presumed that a person from *your* original station in society, who never even enjoyed the advantage of filling the position of a lady's dressing-maid, should be considered competent to the business of counseling a lady upon the subject of her carriage costume!"

The choice language in which this sharp retort was enveloped, so completely blunted its point that it struck quite harmlessly upon simple Mrs. Wildman's ear, and fell without penetrating her brain or heart—as I wish all wicked and crazy speeches intended to wound good hearts might always fall. As for Miss Elizabeth, she treated Nelly Parrott with unvarying kindness, and privately consoled herself for the hearing such insolence as this, by recalling to mind the latitude of speech accorded by the great ladies of the good old times to the court fool and jester.

But our little Nell was the family Nemesis, and never

failed when she knew that Miss Parrott had insulted her grandmother, to visit a choice and appropriate retribution upon the devoted red head of the delinquent; saying to Blaise that she considered it a "ten strike," when she could avenge her friend and punish her natural enemy at one blow.

CHAPTER XVI.

THEODORA AT MOUNT STORM.

She is not beautiful, yet her young face
Makes up in sweetness what it lacks in grace;
She is not beautiful, yet her blue eyes
Beam on the heart like sunshine through the skies.—*Amelia Welby.*

An orphan child, with a very tender, shy, and sensitive nature, thrown upon the bounty of a relative who did not, in the least degree, desire the care and cost of her keeping; who though not naturally cruel, was humanly selfish, and would have considered it much "for the best," had the measles or the whooping-cough or some other childish epidemic relieved her of the burden; who took no pains to conceal this state of feeling from the object of it—such was the condition of Theodora at Mount Storm. With her fine spiritual perceptions, she soon felt the influence of this atmosphere around her. And though she was seldom subjected to the coarse, ill-treatment of which we read and hear much in the lot of orphan and dependent children, yet still she was chilled, depressed, and miserable. She needed the vital air of love, and she found only the deathly atmosphere of cold indifference. She was not the Cinderella of the house; no one set her tasks beyond her strength, or put her to degrading drudgery, or stinted her in food or sleep; yet still she felt wearied, unsatisfied, and lonely—for if no one

threatened her, no one ever smiled kindly upon her; if they did not strike her, neither did they ever caress her; if they did not require of her hard service, neither did they ever show her any token of affection or remembrance. They just let her alone—saddest of all sad conditions for a being like her! For if she had been a child of another sort—a child of a stormy, hoyden temper, like Helen, or of a genial, sunshiny nature, like Vivia—she might have forced or won her way into notice and sympathy; or with the self-reliance of either of those two, she might have dispensed with the love of others, and stood alone; but, with her soft, retiring, humble nature, that needed so much to be loved and lifted up and encouraged, it was, as I said, the saddest of all conditions to be let alone. Positive ill-usage, coarse material brutality, would soon have killed that feeble little body, and set the suffering spirit free. But she was only let alone —to wander through all the rooms of that great, dismal old house, with its forlorn aspect and haunting old histories—alone to explore the terraced garden, or climb the rugged mountain, or lose her way in the boundless forest, to get frightened at some wood-squirrel or rabbit, as timid as herself, and find her way back home as quickly and directly as she could—or alone to sit in the vast, shadowy old garret, until the gathering darkness of the night, and the shuddering fear of ghosts, would drive her thence to the heart-chilling atmosphere of the rooms below. No one attempted to carry forward her education, to hear her read, or to teach her to sew, or to knit, or to do any sort of housework, for no one seemed to have either the time or the inclination to attend to her.

Mrs. Thogmorton, with her house to keep, and her servants to rule, and her daughter Rose to marry off, and her husband, the doctor, to manage, had enough upon her hands, without the trouble of Theodora.

Rose was too much occupied with dress, company, flirta-

tions, and other vanities, to think of little Theo, except sometimes to turn her into a subject of good-natured merriment, calling her Cinderella, Goody-two-shoes, or Beauty, and asking her, when she should come to marry the beautiful young prince, the great king's son, if she would not please to remember her poor relations.

Doctor Thogmorton seldom took notice of the child, or if he did, seemed only to be counting up the cost of her clothing—which, by the way, cost nothing at all, being the cast-off apparel of the two little girls, Jane and Martha, who were now at the Convent school.

And as for the servants about the house, they knew it to be less trouble to do all the work than to teach Theodora how to do a part of it.

This family had the reputation without the reality of wealth, and under these circumstances much domestic unhappiness arose from the conflicting policies of master and mistress; for while Doctor Thogmorton—who was originally a miser, by reason of his little benevolence and hope, and his great cautiousness and acquisitiveness, and who had married the supposed wealthy widow, not to squander her fortune, but to secure himself from the remotest possibility of want—thought it wisest and safest to retrench the expenses and hoard the income of the family, and would have stinted them in common comforts, lest they should come to lack the very necessaries of life, Mrs. Thogmorton, who was endowed with high hope and love of approbation, with very little cautiousness, saw a greater necessity than ever for launching out into expensive ostentation, in dress, furniture, equipage, entertainments, and every other species of false show by which she might dazzle the eyes of her neighbors, so that they should not be able to see the real poverty under its glistening vail, and so, finally, that she might thereby secure a rich husband for each of her daughters, and an heiress for her son.

Their removal to their new home, and the "coming out" of Miss Garland, were fresh temptations to "expatiate" in ostentation.

Rose Garland was undoubtedly as pretty as a well-proportioned form, rather full for early girlhood, regular features and a blooming complexion could make her.

Mount Storm was the show mansion of the neighborhood, every private dwelling in the valley being a mere ordinary farm-house, or log cabin. Much also of the handsome old furniture, being almost immovable, remained standing just where Mrs. Malmaison had left it—that lady thinking it would suffer less damage in remaining there until she should want it for her new house at Sunset Hills, than it would encounter in being removed and stored. So with the rare and costly articles that were left at Mount Storm, and with the furniture that was brought thither from Gray Rock, the best rooms of the mansion-house were furnished and adorned. One suite of rooms—all the appointments of which were too *recherché* for common contact, remained, by previous agreement, closed, as the occupant had left it—this was the splendid apartment of Ada Malmaison, described in a former chapter. The upper rooms of the house, however, were entirely unfurnished, and the garret was abandoned to Theodora and owlets.

Some of the old servants of the Malmaison family remained still at Mount Storm, under the new administration.

Among them was Pharaoh, who was the greatest comfort Theodora had. The old man had not been hired, because he was not considered worth wages; but he had been permitted to stay, for the reason that his services were worth his food and the doctor's cast-off clothing, and further, that he was—in his well-brushed black coat, and white neck-cloth, and powdered-looking head, a remarkably genteel and aristocratic seeming servant. The old man was as full of family history, romance, fable, song and story, as any old

minstrel retainer of the olden times—and never had he found a listener so attentive, interested, and admiring as Theodora.

He was her circulating library, her theatre, her academy of music, her gallery of pictures, and her voyage round the world, all in one—and she was his intelligent audience, his appreciating public, admiring posterity, and embodied fame!

When the family were all gone out for the day and the evening, and Theodora suffered with loneliness and fear in the great empty, ghostly house, and when the shadows of night gathered over the vast rooms and long halls, and the phantoms of superstitious terror invoked by her highly excitable imagination gathered around her, she would creep to the head of the kitchen stairs and call, in a frightened, half-hushed tone—

"Uncle Pharaoh! Uncle Pharaoh! are you there?"

And the old man would come to the foot of the stairs and answer—

"Yes, chile, an' soon as ever I done polishin' this silver, so I can bresh my coat and make myself 'sentable, I gwine to come wait on you, little mist'ess."

And then Theodora, as she dared not show herself in the kitchen, as much from fear of the cook as from dread of the coarse company that took advantage of the absence of the master to gather there, would sit down upon the top step and wait until the old man could come up to her. And then the old creature, whom she never presumed to take into any of the family sitting-rooms to keep her company, would seat himself a step or two below her, and commence, and pass hour after hour in relating old country legends and household traditions, and in telling or inventing stories in which he would describe places with such vividness, that her impressible imagination received the whole picture and distinctly beheld it, and in which also he would imitate voices with so much skill that her excitable fancy saw the whole

scene enacted before her; and then, to vary the evening's entertainment, he would sing songs, or propound conundrums.

"Uncle Pharaoh!" she would say, sometimes, "what a pity you didn't know Vivia when you were young—if you had, you would have written poetry, or painted pictures, and made yourself a famous man."

"Ah! chile, that couldn't o' bin, no ways in the world, you see 'cause I'm not white. Hows'ever, *I is what I is*," Pharaoh would answer, with a quick resumption of his self-esteem.

One morning Theodora sat perched upon an old oak chest, with her head leaning on the sill of her garret window. It was the window in the gable end that looked toward the valley, and commanded the whole length and breadth of that scene. But the landscape was not beautiful now, broken up as it was in the great spring thaw, and showing patches of discolored snow, alternating with quagmires of half frozen mud. And Theodora, finding nothing attractive in the view, half closed her dull and drooping eyes, as she leaned there cold and lifeless. In all the house below there was not a resting-place for the sole of her foot. For there had arisen that morning at the breakfast-table some great matter of dispute between the doctor and his wife, and their furious looks and high words had frightened and sickened her, even before the doctor happening to cast his glance upon her shuddering form and pale face and dilated eyes, suddenly extended his arm and finger toward her, and pointing in a sarcastic manner, began to reproach his wife, among other extravagances, for "filling the house with beggars." To which madame replied, with equal severity, that he himself was a beggar when she married him, and that if it had not been for her folly he would be a beggar *still*—that she had never repented that folly but once, and that was ever since it happened! that she hoped Rose

would learn by her experience, and never throw herself away. Whereupon Rose, dreading to be made a party in the quarrel, got up suddenly and left the table and the room, and Theodora stole away and ran up to her garret.

And there she now sat, depressed, apathetic, and almost dead, with only this conscious wish in her heart: that she had no relations at all, so that she might live at the orphan asylum until she should grow up, and then become a "Sister." But even that was a very feeble emotion; and she lay there with her arms doubled up under her pale cheek, and her dull leaden eyes half open, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, feeling nothing, thinking nothing.

She perceived no one enter and approach, felt no presence very near her, until her head was gently lifted by two white hands, a warm kiss was pressed upon her forehead, and the animating countenance of Vivia smiled upon her!

Her eyes kindling at that smile, she sprang up and cast herself in the arms of her friend. Then Vivia sat down upon the chest, drew Theodora to her side, put her arm around her waist, gathered her cold hands to her own warm bosom, and inquired cheerfully,

"Now what is the matter with my little Dora?"

"Oh, dear Vivia, nothing is the matter now you have come; but you were away so long!"

"I had so much to do, and the roads have been impassable to foot-passengers. This morning I set off at sunrise, so as to get here before the ground thawed. So now open your heart, little Dora, and let me in; show me all that is amiss."

"Oh, dear Genie, every thing was wrong till you came, and now I don't care about any thing else, I am so glad to see you."

"*Every thing*, Dora?"

"Well, yes, almost; first of all I am so lonesome, nobody loves me here."

"Love them, Dora, and they will love you."

"I can't. I don't want to. I feel more like hating them; they frighten and sicken me so."

"Hate is not in your nature, Dora; don't try to make it there. Don't you pity your uncle and aunt, sometimes, when you see them unhappy?"

"Yes—sometimes."

"I am sure you do, for the Lord moves you to kindness. Well, cherish *that* feeling for them. It will be no more trouble for you to cultivate that little flower of compassion that sprang up naturally in your soul, than it would be to transplant there a weed of hate. Don't you see?"

"Yes, dear, good Genie; but you don't know how ill-behaved they are to me—let me tell you what happened this morning."

And then Theodora related all that had passed in the breakfast-room.

"Well, Dora, I hear all that; and now I suppose you think the doctor a very bad man, do you not?"

"Yes, indeed, I do think he is the very worst in the world."

"Well, Dora, if he were so, he would be more to be pitied than the poorest beggar that ever perished in cold and hunger; but he is not so, Dora; there is good in the doctor."

"Good in the doctor!" exclaimed Theodora, as a vision of the man, as he stood in the morning with his arm extended, and his face distorted with rage and sarcasm, as he pointed at her own little harmless self, appeared to her spiritual eye.

"Yes, there is good in every human being; and you can, if you will, draw the good out instead of the evil. And you can prove for yourself, if you wish, how much good there is in the doctor. And it would be interesting to you to find that out, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, but how?" asked Theodora, smiling.

"Thus—you owned, just now, that you sometimes felt sorry for your aunt and uncle, because they lived so unhappily together; now that compassion, if cherished, would often prompt you to such little kindnesses as a girl like you might show—but you *don't* do them."

"No, I am backward, you know."

"Well, you *ought* to do them. Follow the sweet, compassionate monitions of your heart—do all the kindness that it moves you to do toward all persons, good or bad—never mind if you think they seem not to deserve it; perhaps they do not, but perhaps also they will after a while. Evil can never be conquered by evil; it can only be redeemed by good."

"Well, but dear Genie, what is good and what is evil? People confuse my mind so much about that. Now, the Sisters take upon themselves poverty as a good, and I know the doctor thinks poverty the greatest of evils."

"Never mind their differences. One name for good is LOVE, and one name for evil is HATE, and that is all we have to do with it just now. Now, then, you thought the doctor a very bad man—'the very worst in the world,' you said, because of his conduct to you this morning, when he was only very angry, and, for the time being, thoughtless, unreasonable, and unjust. By this time his anger is gone; you did not provoke him, and so, having nothing to remember against you, he thinks only of his own unkindness to you; he *does* think of that; his good angel will not allow him to forget it; so, dear, you must not remember his harshness to you, but take his repentance for granted, and follow every sweet prompting of your heart to kindness, and see what a good result may follow; instead of an element of discord, you may become a spirit of peace in this household."

"I will try, dear, bright Genie, and if you will come to me very often, I may be able."

"And now, what else, Dora?"

"Look at this room," said the child.

Vivia looked around her. It was a large, tight, well-finished garret chamber, with sloping roofs, and one window in the south gable end, at which they sat, and where the sun shone in so brightly and warmly that there was little need of fire. It was furnished with a cot and that chest only.

"Well, it is a fine room! with the most magnificent view of any room in this or any house! Only wait till the snow is melted and the young grass puts up and the trees bud! the view from this window will be one of heavenly beauty! And in the summer you can open the door between this room and the next, and hoist the opposite window in the north gable end, and have a draught through the rooms that will make it delightful to be here. And I will help you to fix up your apartment, too. I think it is a fine thing to have all this garret to yourself!"

"Oh, but at night, dear Genie, I am so much afraid to sleep up here by myself. I wake up sometimes, and feel so lonesome in the great, dark, still place, and I think of all the people that have died in the old house, and their ghosts walking, and I get so frightened I can scarcely help screaming out!"

"You! you, my little heroine, who watched by the dead body of your dear grandmother all night in the silent house?"

"Oh, I knew good angels were *there*, and *here* I do not think they come; but I am afraid evil spirits do."

"Evil spirits cannot come near you unless you draw them by anger or hate, or some evil disposition, which you have not got, dear; and good angels will be with you wherever you may be, while your own heart is good. Remember that, dear. And now, about your drawings!"

"I don't draw now. The pencils are all worn to the wood, and I have no knife to sharpen them."

"Take them all to the doctor, as he sits in his arm-chair after dinner, and ask him to sharpen them for you."

"Oh, I couldn't! Oh, I should be afraid to!'

"No matter—do it! He will put them all in order for you with pleasure. After this morning's affair, he will be glad to do you any little kindness that he can. And, Theodora, he will be a better man for having done it. Will you go?"

"Yes, Genie, I will try to do whatever you tell me!"

"And now, your dress—what is the matter with it?"

"Oh," said Theodora, laughing at the figure she presented as she stood up in her old ash-colored merino, "it is ugly and uncomfortable—it feels as badly as it looks, too. I have my cousin's cast-off clothes, and Mary's gowns are too long and too loose, and I have to lap them over and tuck them up. And Jane's are too short and too tight, and they squeeze me nearly to death!"

"Why are they not altered and made to fit you?"

"No one has time to do it, and I have no needle and thread, and if I had, I should not know how to go to work, and no one has time to show me either. They tell me that it would be less trouble to do the work themselves."

"Well, I have come to spend the day and night with you, and I will get sewing materials from Rose Garland, and I will cut and fit and baste the work for you, and show you how it should be done, and I can help you to do it too, while I stay; so now cheer up," said Vivia, kissing Theodora.

It would take too long to linger with this angel visitant—to go step by step with her and show how she changed the shadows of that house to brightness, how she set Theodora right with her relations, how she reformed her attire,

and adorned her room, and left it peopled with beautiful associations, lovely memories, and bright hopes.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE GARRET.

There is a light around her brow,
A glory in her star-like eyes,
Which shows, though wandering earthward now,
Her spirit's home is in the skies.—*Moore.*

FROM the day of Vivia's visit, Theodora's health, spirits and circumstances improved.

Her once desolate attic chamber, made more comfortable and attractive by a few touches of Vivia's magic hand, and placed under a more hopeful light, assumed a new and cheerful aspect. And yet there had been only a few trifling changes wrought, one or two additions made, and some animating characteristics pointed out; a little trouble taken to make possible improvements, and then a looking upon the brighter side—that was all. Theodora's garret possessed some original good qualities as a basis for improvement; it was high and dry, weather-proof, and commanding a most extensive, magnificent and beautiful landscape of mountain and valley scenery. It was capable of being well warmed in winter, and well ventilated in summer. The bare and sloping walls were white, the uncarpeted floor was clean, and the windows clear and stainless. The furniture consisted of a cot bedstead, with its narrow mattrass and single pillow and scanty covering, and of the oaken chest that contained Theodora's small stock of second-hand clothing, and always stood under the south gable window, as a sort of seat, or as a table, according to the owner's need.

Thus that chest contrived more than "a double debt to pay," for it performed the threefold duties of wardrobe, chair, and desk. This was the condition of things when Vivia volunteered to assist Theodora in arranging this attic, which I hope I may be excused for thus minutely describing, inasmuch as it was the constant home of the orphan and studio of the artist for many long years, or until she was eighteen.

A little white quilt and valance, graciously bestowed by Mrs. Thogmorton, gave the small cot bedstead quite a neat appearance. A little table, with a drawer, disinterred from heaps of rubbish, in another room, and brought and set beside the south window, covered with a white cloth, and ornamented with a small hanging mirror, flanked by two card-board boxes, formed a tolerable dressing-stand. White cambric curtains, made from an old skirt of Rose Garland, shaded the two windows. A little three-cornered wash-stand and two chairs, extricated from the lumber room, and polished up for service, completed the new additions of furniture.

And the broad ledge of the north window afforded Theodora a convenient drawing and reading desk; in one corner of which was piled up her little stock of drawing materials, and in the other her small library, consisting of a pocket Bible, Goldsmith's Natural History, Tooke's Heathen Mythology, Butler's Lives of the Saints, and the Arabian Nights. All precious relics of her mother, with the exception of the last mentioned, which was a premium gained at school.

Here, all day long, the neglected, but studious, enthusiastic child sat alone and worked with her needle or with her beloved pencil, or read or dreamed, never interrupted, unless she happened to forget the dinner hour, and some impatient servant came running up to call her, and afterward to scold her all the way down stairs. But Mrs.

Thogmorton who was an orderly housekeeper, put a stop to that by giving directions that she should not be called, saying that if Theodora did not appear with the other members of the family when they sat down to the table, she might miss her dinner, to teach her the lesson of punctuality. And after that it frequently happened that Theodora, reading or drawing, or sewing and dreaming—these two last-mentioned processes always going on together—forgot all about her meals until hunger and faintness reminded her of them; and upon these occasions, when she went below, she invariably found that the table had been cleared, and every thing from it put away some hours before. Then she would go into the kitchen where she found a friend in old Pharaoh, who always had, from his own resources, a large apple or a roasted sweet potato, or something of the sort, saved up for her, and this amply satisfied her wants until supper time. For whether it be true, as has been said, that genius is naturally ascetic, or whether that feebleness of her organization and imperfection of her external senses, to which I have before adverted, rendered her indifferent to luxury, I do not know; but certainly Theodora was singularly abstemious, literally eating only to live, content with an apple, a crust, any thing that would stop the importunate craving of nature, that drew her mind away from the subject of its rapt contemplation.

One of Theodora's greatest troubles was the wearing out of her pencils and the giving out of her paper, and the difficulty of procuring a new supply. This she considered a very great deprivation indeed, though, in point of fact, it was not an evil, but rather a good, as the scarcity and frequent exhaustion of her materials prevented her from wearying herself, and kept her enthusiasm ever green and fresh.

Second only to her passionate love of art was her love of books. Her little stock of books had been read once, and

only once; she was not one to wear out any volume, however well beloved, with frequent perusal; and never cared to read any work through a second time; a creative mind seldom does; such a mind draws from one book at one reading all the ideas homogenial to its own nurture and growth, and then goes on with insatiate hunger to find fresh food from other sources. So Theodora, in those intervals of time, when her pencil remained idle for the want of paper, or else her paper blank for the want of a pencil, read every thing that she could lay hands on.

I have once described the library of Mount Storm, as it existed in the days of the late Colonel Malmaison. It occupied, you may remember, the central passage of the second story, the walls of which were lined alternately with family pictures and well-filled book-cases. It remained unaltered in all respects.

Theodora passed this passage many times a day in going to and fro between her garret and the lower part of the house. At first, and for many weeks, she only looked longingly at the book-cases; finally unable any longer to resist the daily and almost hourly temptation, she trespassed upon the collection—opened a book-case, selected a volume of Cook's Voyages, and carried it off to her roost to *devour*—yes! that is the word, for that afternoon the book was read, and the next morning it was exchanged for another, which was read before night, and replaced by a third. And so in the course of a week, Theodora got through a dozen or more volumes of miscellaneous literature, when Vivia suddenly appeared, bringing a couple of pencils and a roll of paper.

Then the star of art was in the ascendant for two or three weeks, until the drawing materials being exhausted, the library became again the daily resource.

I should hesitate to tell you what scores of volumes upon all subjects—arts, science, literature, belles lettres, this young

girl waded through. What though she did not understand all that she read?—the zest, the excitement she felt in pursuing some unattained, dimly perceived ideas would carry her through formidable volumes of dry metaphysics or drier theology. She read every thing—all was "grist" that came to her intellectual "mill"—that is to say, all with a few exceptions; for though the whole library was open to her, and no one interfered to restrain or direct her choice of books—yet that fine instinct, that was nature's compensation to her for a feeble frame and imperfect senses, made her a delicate discerner of spirits in books as well as in people, and she invariably closed and replaced any volumes accidentally opened, which a careful mother would have kept from her knowledge. In those days illustrated works were not nearly so numerous as they are now; therefore it was very seldom that Theodora found in her researches among the books a good engraving, and when she did, it was an epoch in her history—and the print was copied with great zeal, to the best of her ability. The first sight of any new picture was an event of intense interest to her.

As the season advanced, the visits of Vivia to Mount Storm became more frequent, and the life of the solitary little enthusiast grew proportionately brighter. Almost every Friday evening Vivia would make her appearance at the door of Theodora's elevated domicil, and there she would often find the girl at the north window, perched upon a chair, in any other than a graceful attitude, with her work before her on the ledge of the window, and her face bent down low over it, so absorbed in drawing as to be totally unconscious of the approach of Vivia, until that bright creature touched and smiled upon her; then with a sudden joyful start, Theodora would spring up and throw herself in the arms of her angel.

Vivia was also gladly welcomed by the family at Mount Storm. I do not mean to say that any of them, except

Theodora, loved her, but all liked her, all were pleased with her animating presence. The doctor was as gallant and polite to her as though she had been twenty years old, instead of fifteen. Mrs. Thogmorton would have inaugurated her into the best guest chamber in the house. Rose invited her, nay, pressed her, and grew angry because she declined, to share her own luxurious apartment on the second floor. But Vivia would have mercy on whom she would have mercy, and chose to share the attic of that pale young enthusiast whom all the household dubbed a dunce. And Rose thought it quite incomprehensible that a beautiful girl of Vivia's age should prefer the society of a stupid child of twelve, moping in a garret, to the company of herself and the beaux that nightly congregated in the cheerful drawing-room below.

But Vivia by no means encouraged her friend to confine herself so closely to that attic chamber, to which her devotion to art and her feebleness of frame alike united to bind her. When Vivia came over Friday evening, they would rise early Saturday morning, make up their bed, put the room in order, dress themselves, and then open that oak chest, examine Theodora's impoverished wardrobe, alter or repair what needed improvement, and so spend an hour or two before breakfast in putting the child's scanty clothing in good order for the next week. After breakfast they would return to the attic and look over Theodora's sketches of the previous week—Vivia making certain suggestions and giving some instructions. After an hour or two spent thus, they would put on their bonnets, and go out for a long ramble up the brow of the precipice behind the mansion house, over its summit, and down into the forest on the other side. Sometimes they would ramble in an opposite direction; down the avenue that led from the front portico of the house, through the terraced garden to the rugged steps cut in the solid rock that led to the base

of the mountain and the banks of Mad River; cross over the rapids by springing from rock to rock, and ramble through the sparsely-wooded vale until they reached the Sunset Hills—most beautiful now in their summer glory; a perfect Acadia, an Elysium, an Eden, a picture for a Claude Lorraine pencil, not for mine. It was where the South mountain range came to an end by falling in a succession of undulating hills, now covered with soft, fresh verdure; encircled by clear, purling brooks, tributaries of Mad River; shaded by groves of trees, some growing in close groups upon the hilltops, some following the course of the streams; and enamelled by countless varieties of wild flowers. It was the favorite haunt of birds also, and the blue bird, the oriole, the mocking bird, the bob-o'-link, and the humbler thrush and linnet made this paradise vocal with their concerts. How much Theodora rejoiced in these walks with Vivia! Life and strength were inhaled with every breath; light came to her languishing eyes, and color to her cheeks, giving her face a wonderful charm, which, if it was not beauty, riveted attention with a sweet fascination. Here, seated on a flower-bank under the shade of some great tree beside the brook, Vivia would sometimes look at her with her own bright face full of loving admiration.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE POOR STUDENT.

A wide future is before him;
His heart will beat for fame,
And he will learn to breathe with love
The music of a name,
Writ on the tablets of his heart
In characters of flame.—*Sargent.*

On Monday morning, going home from one of these visits, Vivia passed as usual through the front gate of the Convent, but upon this occasion she paused by the porter's lodge, which now, in summer, was a very pretty place covered with creeping vines, the culture of which was a favorite occupation of Brother Peter; and shaded by one of the two Titan poplar trees that grew each side of the Convent portal. The door and window of the lodge were both open for the better circulation of the air, and Vivia saw the whole interior of the lodge, and that Wakefield Brunton occupied it alone.

There were now five other poor boys of the neighborhood, who, through Vivia's intercessions, shared Brother Peter's instructions; but as their attendance was almost necessarily irregular, there was seldom more than two or three present at a time, besides Wakefield, who was invariably punctual; and that was as many as the little room would accommodate.

Now, however, the hour was early, and no one had arrived but Wake, and he sat with his chair drawn up to the table, his elbows resting on it, his forehead dropped upon the palms of his hands, and his eyes fixed upon the open gram-

mar before him. His attitude and expression was very serious, not to say sulky.

Vivia went up behind him and laid her hand upon his shoulder.

Wake looked up and met her happy, inspiring smile

"Good morning, Wakefield."

"Oh! good morning, Miss Genevieve," he said, getting up and handing her his chair.

"Thank you, I do not wish to sit down, Wakefield. Where is Brother Peter?"

"Not come down from his breakfast yet!"

"And none of the boys come yet?"

"No, Miss Genevieve, they do not come often or early, not nearly so much so since *you* do not come to help us," said the youth with a dash of reproach in his tone.

"I hoped, Wakefield, that I had got you all well started, and duty called me elsewhere."

"I never see you at all, *now*, Miss Genevieve!"

"I have two large classes in the Orphan Asylum to teach, and the children's ward in the Infirmary to visit regularly; besides I have the sole care of our Mother's rooms, and am obliged by her orders to go on with my own studies."

"But I thought, Miss Genevieve, that you took the highest honors of the Academy, last year, so there was no more for you to learn there?"

"I took the highest degree certainly, yet our Mother directs me to occupy certain hours every day with reading and improving myself in music and in painting; and I must not disobey her, Wakefield; but I will ask her to remit my obligations some days, so that I may visit you."

A sort of sulky assent rather than thanks was the response.

"Well, now then! now that I am here—what is the matter, Wakefield?" asked Vivia, cheerfully.

"I have so much to contend with, Miss Genevieve, so many privations and hinderances, and even almost insurmountable obstacles, I feel like giving right up, that I do, for I think I have more to struggle with than any one ever had before."

"No, you have not; yours is the trial of every human soul, the trial that is to prove what manner of spirit they are of—strong spirits, persevering, self-denying, heroic spirits, willing to endure, if necessary, severe privation, to perform hard labor, to wait hopefully long years for final success, surmount all obstacles, and grow stronger in their struggle—only weak, pusillanimous spirits, who cower before hardships, disappointments and difficulties ever fail. 'Many are called, but few are chosen,' for the simple reason that few are willing to persevere to the end. And that is right. For you would not have the glorious prizes of life, that should be the conquests of industry, self-denial, and courage—as easily in the reach of sloth, gluttony and cowardice? No, in this struggle cowards fail, heroes conquer! Now are you a hero? will you conquer?"

The youth—he was now a handsome boy of fifteen, flushed and then smiled; his despondency and surliness were charmed away.

"Miss Genevieve," he said, "if only you would come often and speak a cheerful, animating word to me, such as you have this morning, I should not droop so sadly!"

"I will come when I can, Wake; but you will be strong and not need me; you will remember how many young students have toiled alone, without any to speak a kind, cheering word to them, and you will grow strong in thinking what triumphs they finally achieved."

"Oh! I could not—could not do without you, Miss Genevieve—you are like—like the breath of life to me! When you talk to me I feel able to do any thing; but when you stay away so long I lose all hope and confidence in my-

self. I see that I am only one of a despised race—one of the 'poor whites'—the son of a day laborer; and the thought of ever being any thing better than my poor father, seems to me like presumption; and the idea of ever distinguishing myself, or doing the world any sort of good, seems then no less than raving madness. Why, look at me!"

"Well, I am looking at you, and I see if you will only be true to yourself, that you could scarcely be in a better position than you are now for attaining success."

"What, Miss Genevieve! not if I were a rich man's son?"

"No! for the temptations to a life of ease and worthlessness would be more serious obstacles to your success than any which you now encounter; the sons of rich men seldom or never distinguish themselves."

"Well, then, would I not be better off if some wealthy gentleman were to take charge of me and send me to college, and afterward on my travels for improvement?" suggested Wake, smiling at the fancy.

"A thousand nays! it would destroy or impair your chief element of success, your self-reliance; I know of one poor and highly gifted boy, a poet, whose genius attracted the attention of a rich man; he was adopted, educated and sent abroad—but it did not end well; the temptations of the society in which he was thrown, won him from the self-abnegation of genius—and after a few fitful efforts, his glorious promise went down in a slough of self-indulgence, sinking in dissipation, and finally terminating in disgrace and death. I know of another, a youth of great talent, and a strong practical turn of mind; he educated himself and studied law, and had a vocation for politics; he attracted the attention of a great declining statesman who thought his young, unwearied genius would be useful to him; he patronized the boy, who thought his fortune was made by that distinguished notice; he was gradually initiated into the secret

machinery of party tactics; he was taken to mass meetings, and to political barbecues to make speeches; he did the statesman, not the state, some service; he thought himself on the high road to distinction, but alas! he gradually lost first his inclination toward a close application to study, and then he lost the power; he acquired a taste for wandering, for high living, for popular applause and excitement generally. When the statesman that had brought this young aspirant out died, his mighty mantle fell not upon the shoulders of his disciple, grown too weak to bear it—but listen! upon the sturdy back of a young man who had never been made effeminate by patronage, but who had schooled himself between the hours of driving a plane behind a carpenter's bench—while the light of that young, ruined genius was quenched in—wine! These facts are portions of family history, Wakefield! I have heard them many times, in detatched portions, which I have put together to draw my own inferences—this is one, Wakefield, that self-made men are the best and strongest, if not invariably the most righteous."

"So I think, Miss Genevieve, when I hear you talk. Yes! and for a long time afterward I feel equal to any exertion or any accomplishment, but when you are long absent I grow depressed and discouraged, and I think how shall I ever succeed in the end—I, the son of a poor widow?"

"Listen further, Wakefield! if I were to call over to you all the distinguished men that our country has produced in all the departments of fame, you would find nine out of ten the sons of poor parents, laboring men, or widows. Some day we will go over the list together, just for the curiosity of the subject, and see if I am not right. There! Brother Peter is coming—mind, don't disappoint him of what is likely to be his favorite boast when he falls into dotage and garrulity. And here, Wakefield, here are two cravats I have brought you. Theodora hemmed them, but they are my colors, and you will wear them for my sake, and think

of all I told you," she concluded, putting on the table two half squares of white cambric, dotted over with small red rose buds. Then before he could thank her she bade him good-by, and tripped away, leaving the boy full of new zeal. She tripped along up the shaded avenue leading to the Convent. Meeting Brother Peter she gave him good morning with an animating smile and nod, that made the old man feel it to be a very good morning indeed; and then passed into the building.

Were Theodora and Wakefield then her only proteges? Far from it! Time would fail to tell you of them. In the cloister; in the Young Ladies' Academy; in the Orphan Asylum; in the Hospital; in the valley below; in the mountains around;—wherever there was sickness of soul or body to be ameliorated or cured; a fainting heart to be encouraged; a failing mind to be inspired; hardships to be softened; dullness to be enlightened; bad passions to be exorcised; estranged friends to be reconciled; evil habits to be changed; circumstances to be improved; ignorance to be taught; deficiencies of any sort to be made up; suffering from any cause to be soothed or cured; there the bright visitant might be found ministering as far as they had need and she had power, to whomsoever would receive her.

One long, long summer's day, Theodora bent over one picture from morning till noon; forgot her dinner, and pursued her work, until the gentle admonition of hunger brought it to her mind; even then she postponed the claims of nature, and went on with her work until appetite went away and fever came; and still with flushed cheeks she bent over her drawing until the summer sun descended and set, and the waning day gave not light enough for her eyes; even then she took up her materials and moved them to the south window, where there was still some lingering light, and perching herself upon the oak chest, and

placing her picture on the window ledge before her, she bent over it again with the same unwearied zeal. She was still bending over her work when two cool hands were placed upon her burning cheeks. She sprang up, her eyes dancing with joy.

"Why, Vivia, what an unexpected pleasure to see you here in the middle of the week, dear!"

"So it is to me! To-morrow is the Fourth of July, you know, and a holiday; and I got leave to come to you this evening, to stay until the fifth; but how your cheeks are flushed, and how hot your hands are—you have a fever, dear."

"Only a fever of excitement, Genie. I have been all day long at work on this picture, and I *cannot* make it what I wish to!" said Theodora, in despair.

"Cannot come up to your ideal—a very commen case, my love; for no matter how great your power of execution may be, the ideal, the heavenly guide, will still keep above you, and it is well, for thus only can it lead you from height to height infinitely. Yet you will succeed with your picture."

"Oh, I don't know, I have been working at it all day; my head aches badly, and my heart aches sorely, and yet it seems to me that the picture gets worse and worse. Only look at it," said Theodora, in a desponding voice, handing the sketch to Vivia.

"Not this evening, dear, there is not light enough to see it to advantage, and you are too much exhausted already. We will examine it together to-morrow morning," replied Vivia, taking the picture, and putting it away in a plain portfolio, formed of a doubled square of common blue pasteboard.

Theodora sank upon the floor and dropped her head upon Vivia's lap.

"It is in vain for me to ever think of being an artist—I shall fail and break my heart, I know I shall!"

"You will *not*, you will succeed! you are a very young girl yet—your sketches are wonderful. All artists feel depressed at times. You must not despair because you cannot accomplish what even finished artists cannot always do. Your aspirations, united to such perseverance as you have, are an earnest of the highest success. You will yet paint pictures—glorious pictures, that shall inspire all who behold and understand them. But to live to do this, my Dora, you must take better care of your poor little body and not let it suffer so. Just take the same pity on your poor little faithful, ill-used servant of a body, that you would on any other abused slave, and show it some mercy. Come now! bathe your face and head, and comb your hair," said Vivia, rising and pouring water from the ewer into the basin.

Theodora smiling faintly, went and obeyed her. And after she had washed and dried her face, and while she stood combing out her dark brown hair, Vivia uncovered a little wicker basket that hung upon her arm, and displaying its contents, said—

"Here are some fine peaches and some pears, the first of the season. They came from our Mother's garden—I brought them for you; I will pare some while you plait your hair—they are the very best things you can eat now after your fasting to cool your fever;" and taking a silver-clasped knife from her pocket, Vivia prepared the fruit. "There is a great deal of life-giving power in fresh, ripe fruit, if you notice, Theodora," she said, handing her friend, who had sat down beside her on the chest, a delicious peach.

"There is a great deal more in your dear love, Vivia; I should have died for sheer want of animation if it had not been for you."

"Not you! you could not be spared! You would have had a more lonely, sorrowful time, and might have painted

dismal pictures—perhaps that would have been the worst. Now when you have done eating, we will put on our bonnets and walk out into the pleasant twilight. We will climb up to the top of the ridge and watch the harvest moon rise, and then come home in time for Mrs. Thogmorton's tea-table."

"But will it not be too late for us to go out, dear Genie?"

"No—you *must* have a walk after such a day as this has been with you. The evening is delightful. Fido came over with me, and he can go with us. So there will be no danger. Poor Fido! he is getting old now, but I hope he may have a metempsychosis and be a man next time. I am sure he deserves to!" said Vivia, smiling, as she finished paring and handed the last peach to Theodora.

When she had eaten this and declared herself to be delightfully refreshed and strengthened, they put on their bonnets, went down stairs and sallied forth, accompanied by Fido, for a walk. They were gone two hours—returned in time for tea, spent the evening with the family in the parlor, and retired to their attic for the night.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE GIRL ARTIST.

Yet must her brow be paler, she has vowed
To crown it with the crown that cannot fade
When it is faded.—*E. B. Browning.*

THE next morning, after they had risen, made the bed, set the room in order, washed and dressed themselves, they went to examine Theodora's picture. It was spread out on the oak chest and they sat in judgment upon it. It was a sketch of Henri de Navarre, at the battle of Ivry, taken

at the moment he is in the act of saying to his followers—"Soldiers! if your colors are taken, rally to my white plume! You will always find it in the path to glory!" or, as Macaulay beautifully renders it—

> "And if my standard-bearer fall, as fall full well he may—
> For never saw I promise yet of such a bloody fray—
> Press where ye see my white plume shine, amid the ranks of war,
> And be your oriflamme, to-day, the helmet of Navarre."

"Well Vivia, what do you think of it!"

"It is a fine subject for the pencil, my little hero-worshiper."

"Ah! that is what I feel deep in my soul! but I cannot do it, you see! that's what breaks my heart! and the principal figure, my hero on horseback, flourishing his fighting falchion and cheering his hosts is the greatest failure. The horse looks more like a donkey in a fit of St. Vitus's dance, than the mettlesome, snorting war-horse that I intended to make. And my hero has been in turn a sulky man, a wild man, a sick man, and a mad man, as I have worked at him—for when I tried to make him look firm, he only looked solid; when I changed that, and tried to make him look enthusiastic and inspiring, he only looked crazy and dangerous; and now, after working myself into a fever, you see what I have turned out—a lunatic riding on a donkey that has been bit by a tarantula! I could laugh, if my heart wasn't half broken by this failure."

"It is not a failure—it a very well-imagined picture—though it might be better in its execution; still, a very few striking touches will remedy its defects. It is a wonderful work for you, at your age, Theodora, and gives promise of great things in the future. For what little girl, not quite thirteen years old, unless she had great genius, would dare to imagine such a subject as this of your picture, and venture even to realize it upon paper? Give me your pencil, and I will show you what you meant."

Theodora handed the required instrument, and Vivia studied the picture before her, touching it slightly once, then studying carefully for a while, then touching it again, then studying, then touching, until a quarter of an hour had passed, during which she never looked up from the picture, which she had not touched more than half a dozen times—she seemed to be chary of her pencil strokes, reflecting how to make them as few as possible, and to place them where they would *tell* best, and bring out the hidden soul of the rough sketch. Her own face was as beautiful as an angel's while she bent over this work of love.

"There, Theodora! that is what you meant, dear," she said, at last, holding up the picture.

An exclamation of surprise and delight burst from the lips of Theodora.

"Oh! dear, Vivia, the very idea! it lives! it moves! but every thing you touch lives! how did you do it?"

"I believe I only deepened some of your own touches to bring out certain points of the picture in greater relief."

Theodora smiled delightedly, and then drawing another sketch from her simple portfolio, laid it over the first one, and waited the result.

"Rose Garland's likeness!" said Vivia.

"Yes! I am so glad that you know it!"

"I could not miss knowing it, though it has a more beautiful expression than Rose—you could not help idealizing, if you would."

"Has it any expression? it seems to me to be a blank, dumb likeness."

"It seems so only compared to the picture you have in your mind's eye—lend me the pencil again—may I touch this?"

"'Oh, dear Vivia! how could you ask me? You may do what you please with me, and all I possess!" exclaimed Theodora, embracing her friend, and giving her the pencil.

About five minutes Vivia studied the likeness, touching it only with three or four well-placed strokes, and then she handed it to Theodora, saying,

"There dear, is that what you have in your mind?"

"How did you do that, Genevieve!" exclaimed Theodora, joyfully, seeing that with these few strokes Vivia had brought the picture to life.

"I don't quite know, but I want you to watch me next time, to be able to do it yourself."

"Why it seems to me that you just touch the corners of the mouth, and it smiles; and the eyelids, and the eyes lighten; and add a stroke to the shadows of a curl, and it waves on the breeze! How do you do it?"

"I cannot tell! watch me, and learn," said Vivia. "Show me another."

Theodora took out a third sketch and laid it over the other two.

"Doctor Thogmorton! Idealizing again! He looks like a Coriolanus, Dora!"

"Oh! the face is like enough, but it is just as dumb as the others. Take your magic wand and make it speak, dear Vivia, while I look on and try to learn the spell."

"This needs only the lines deepened, and the features pointed off, thus, look?" said Vivia, taking the pencil and touching the picture at two or three points to bring out the character.

"That is himself!" exclaimed Theodora, joyously. "I almost expect to hear him tell me to get out of his way!" she added, laughing.

"Now, Dora, do you know what I am going to do to-day?" asked Vivia seriously.

"No! what!"

"I am going to take these portraits down stairs and show them to the family."

"Oh, no! oh, please don't! they would make so much fun of me and my work!" cried Theodora, in real distress.

"Suppose I were to assure you that they would not? Theodora, they have not the slightest suspicion of your real genius for art. And they ought to know it. You require facilities for improvement that I believe they would cheerfully afford you. Shall I not take them down now?"

"Just as you please, dear Genie; we can see the result."

So Vivia rolled up the two portraits, and when the breakfast bell rang she took them down. And afterward, when the family were assembled in the front parlor, she unrolled the sketches, and placed the portrait of Rose Garland before the original.

"What's this? dear me, my likeness! where did it come from? Who did it? Where did you get it, Genevieve?"

"Do you think it good?" asked Vivia.

"Why, it's splendid!" exclaimed Miss Rose, who was not very exact in her application of words. "Splendid! but how came you by it?"

"Theodora drew it from memory."

"Theodora? tut! she couldn't," sneered Rose; "but who *did?*"

"Indeed, Miss Garland, Theodora drew it; and when you have done looking at that—"

"Done looking at this! why, child, do you suppose I am going to let it pass out of my possession? the only 'counterfeit presentment' of my face I ever had in my life?" said Rose, half in jest, half in earnest.

"I was going to say, Miss Garland, that when you have done looking at it, I can show you another portrait, equally well done by the same hand; here it is," said Vivia, laying the other before her.

"Papa-doctor!" exclaimed Rose, taking and gazing at it in astonishment. "Mother! come here! do come here! here is a mystery!

The doctor and his wife came to see what was the matter.

The portraits were shown, their authorship revealed, and the family were astonished, and the work praised to the heart's content of Vivia.

"Poor little miserable, I knew she was always wearing my lead pencils, and getting them sharpened, until papa-doctor had mercy on her, and on himself, too, and gave her a cheap pen-knife! but I had no idea of *this*. I wonder who has kept her in pencils and paper?"

No one answered, no one knew except Vivia, and she gave no information; but only said,

"I think, Dr. Thogmorton, that your niece has a very high degree of talent for art, and that she ought to have every advantage in cultivating it."

"And she shall, she shall," said the doctor, slowly and thoughtfully; contemplating, with much satisfaction, his own idealized portrait, which, perchance, might have suggested the idea that such a remarkably noble looking man ought to behave well. Then he smoothed out the portraits, and went and placed them carefully in a portfolio of engravings that ornamented a centre-table in the drawing-room.

And where in the mean time was Theodora? To avoid this scene, the timid creature had stolen away from the breakfast-table, and without approaching the parlor had hastened to the garret, whither Vivia soon followed her with the favorable verdict of the critics below, and with the promise of Doctor Thogmorton that she should have every advantage for the cultivation of her talent. Of course Theodora was delighted, and thought that with these promised advantages, her success was secured.

And the doctor really meant what he said, though unfortunately he was only vaguely cognizant of what those pledged "facilities" ought to be. When he next went to Eyrie, he procured from the druggist there, who was also the fancy dealer, bookseller, and stationer of the village, a

box of paints, a set of camel's hair pencils, and a supply of Bristol board, and presenting them to Theodora the next morning at breakfast, gave the girl almost the happiest day she had ever known in her life; and to her warm but shyly expressed thanks, he replied, good-naturedly, that he would keep her supplied with materials, and that all she would have to do would be to go on and paint pictures enough to cover all the walls in the house.

Theodora had never drawn in colors, and the possession of her box of paints was a fresh stimulant, had she needed one; and she toiled indefatigably, sometimes with success and high enthusiasm, sometimes with failure and despondency, *always* with perseverance. Vivia came to her aid very often. This bright visitant would find her favorite—sometimes at the garret window, bowed down with cheeks burning like fire, over her work—sometimes, in the old deserted garden-arbor, thrown down upon the grass, with her head supported by her arm, and an open book under her eyes. And always she brought her encouragement, life, and light.

They had not been at the Sunset Hills for some weeks. One evening, when Vivia entered Theodora's attic, she found the girl perched upon the old oak chest, with her feet drawn up under her, in a more comfortable than graceful position, her elbows on the window sill, her chin on her hands, and her soft brown eyes contracted in the effort to see distinctly some distant object.

"Will you tell me, Vivia," she said, when the first greetings were over, "what that white segment of a circle is, over at the Sunset Hills? I never noticed it until this week, and I can only see it when, as now, it catches the last rays of the sun."

"That, my dear? Why, it is the rising walls of Mrs. Malmaison's new mansion-house. The contractor and builders have been at work there for a month past, and the walls are just rising into sight."

"Why, you don't say so!" exclaimed the girl, with great interest; "it will be a most beautiful place, but I am so surprised! why didn't you tell me before!"

"I took it for granted that you knew, as Doctor Thogmorton is Mrs. Malmaison's agent. I did not reflect that you were such an abstracted little dreamer."

"And that is the reason we have not been there lately?"

"Yes, dear; it is not a pleasant place to go to just now, with the litter of the building materials, and the shanties of the workmen, and the drinking and noise and confusion. But by-and-by it will be delightful. Mrs. Malmaison has directed the doctor to spare no expense in hastening the completion of the building; so the contractor has engaged a number of workmen, and promises that the mansion shall be ready for habitation upon the first of the new year."

"I had not heard a word of it."

"You mean you had not listened to a word, you little abstraction! Perhaps you have not heard either that Mrs. Malmaison is expected, in the course of a few weeks, to visit Mount Storm?"

"And to bring Austin?—yes, I have heard something of that, for aunt has had her suite of rooms opened and prepared."

CHAPTER XX.

THE SPIRIT OF THE CHOIR.

Hers was the spell o'er hearts
Which only genius gives,
The mistress of the sister arts,
Where all their beauty lives.—*Changed from Campbell.*

It was near the middle of August when Mrs Malmaison, with her son Austin and her servants, came up to the country

seat at Mount Storm. Doctor Thogmorton, who was at once her tenant and her agent, received the lady with great distinction. And Mrs. Thogmorton, with assiduous attention, conducted her to the reserved suite of apartments that had been prepared for her use. Mrs. Malmaison's especial business in the neighborhood, was to give her personal attention to some details in the construction of her new house across the valley at Sunset Hills; while at the same time she hoped to derive benefit from the salubrious air of the mountains. Early every morning she rode, attended by Doctor Thogmorton and Austin, over to the side of the new mansion, and passed a few hours in consultation with her architect. She returned before noon, and spent the middle of the day in receiving calls from the neighborhing gentry, who came to welcome the lady's brief return to her home. She passed the evening in entertaining visitors at Mount Storm, or in going into company elsewhere.

The doctor, Mrs. Thogmorton, and her daughter, Rose Garland, were in their fullest flower of gayety and good looks.

But all this time the poor orpan, Theodora, for the reason that she had no good clothes in which to make her appearance before the great lady, was bidden to keep herself out of sight; and so she confined herself to her garret, only coming down the back stairs, and slipping out of the back door to get a little fresh air, and appearing only at the second table.

When the Sabbath came Mrs. Malmaison inquired whether Divine service would be offered at the Catholic Chapel at Eyrie, or at the Convent; as Father Bernard, the parish priest, officiated on alternate Sundays at these two extreme points of his extensive charge.

Doctor Thogmorton replied that on this Sunday, being the Feast of Assumption, mass would be offered at the Con-

vent chapel. Thither, therefore, the lady went, accompanied by Mrs. Thogmorton and Rose Garland.

The chapel was an elegant little gothic structure, on the right-hand side of the Convent gate. Within it was beautifully finished and fitted up, and adorned with several choice statues and fine oil-paintings over the three altars and between the tall, pointed windows of stained glass, through which the morning sun streamed, flooding the scene with a rich rainbow glory. At the right-hand side of the church, behind an elaborately ornamented lattice, was the cloister, in which the Sisters of the Convent worshiped. Opposite the altar, over the front entrance of the chapel, was the gallery appropriated to the choir, and in which stood one of the finest-toned organs in the country. The church was filled by a rustic congregation from the immediate neighborhood.

It certainly was not religion, nor its perversion, superstition, nor even force of habit, that brought Ada Malmaison to church, but the mixed motives of worldliness, ennui, and refined sensuality. Sundays in the contrary were dull, it looked well to go to church, where besides, there was sure to be nothing said or done to trouble her conscience, but every thing to please her senses. By the holy works of art, the dumb eloquence of the sacred paintings and statuary, the heavenly music and the imposing ceremonies, *others* might feel their souls roused and raised to worship, *she* only felt her senses wrapt in a sort of delicious elysium. The antique style of beauty in the chapel, the elaborate carvings, the fine old pictures and statues, the highly ornate altars, the rich vestments of the priests, and the deep-toned, mellowed light thrown by the stained glass-windows, pleased her eyes; while the fine music in all it variations, in the singing of the choir, the pealing of the organ, and the chanting and intoning of the sacristans, delighted her ear; and the rich aroma of the incense penetrated her brain with an influence that enveloped her senses in a sweet delirium.

But the music had the greatest charm for her. *Nero* loved music passionately. Ada Malmaison loved it madly. Yet to her it was altogether a sensual gratification. She had an exquisite *ear*, but no soul. Music delighted her sense of hearing, but woke no high, holy, or loving aspiration; it had no redeeming influence upon her—nay, it might have had an opposite influence; she would, if she thought it necessary, procure the gratification of this hunger, by any low, unjust or cruel means. If any one doubts the truth of this assertion that the appetite—(for passion of taste it does not merit in *this* instance to be called)—for music may exist together with intense selfishness and sensuality, let him call to mind some of the foreign professional singers whom he may have seen, and whose faces were stamped certificates of the fact I have named. However, with all her selfishness, worldliness and sensuality, Ada Malmaison was very crafty and secretive; passions and emotions she had not, and the character of her inner life never revealed itself upon her snow white, delicately chiseled face. She sat in the church, not worshiping, but wrapped in this sensuous elysium until one voice awoke her from it.

Such a voice!

They were singing the Gloria in Excelsis, with the accompaniment of the organ and of the whole chorus. This was a girl's voice. Suddenly, out of the storm of music by the whole chorus, it arose and soared, sweet, clear, pure, elastic, joyous as some angel in the free ether winging her rapturous way to Heaven!

"Gloria in Excelsis!" the voice seemed to hover and float in the sunny mid-air awhile, then in a sudden rapturous flight to soar upward in an ecstasy of loving adoration! No words can describe its delightful, inspiring power. Ada Malmaison was enchanted. Never had she, an amateur in music, heard a voice so charming. She became as it were "all ear," and in the variations of the music, lis-

tened with a sense *athirst* for that delicious strain. When the service was over, she arose with a sigh, she could not bear to think that she should hear that heavenly chorister no more.

"Who was that, that sang solo in the Gloria?" she inquired of Rose Garland, as they were coming out of the church.

"That was Genevieve Laglorieuse, or Vivia, as we call her."

"Oh!" that was all the fair lady said at the time. But when she was seated in the carriage she asked, "Do they have Vespers in the chapel?"

"Always."

"And does that young lady sing?"

"Yes, madam."

"Then I shall go to Vespers this afternoon. Bid Pharaoh to drive fast, doctor, or we shall not have time to dine and rest, and get here again for Vespers."

That afternoon the lady was even more delighted than she had been in the morning.

And the next day at an early hour she ordered her carriage. Telling Doctor Thogmorton that she should not visit her new mansion-house that day, she entered the carriage and drove to the Convent.

That morning the Abbess sat alone in her parlor; her chair was drawn up to the centre-table, where lay paper, pens and ink; she had been writing, but just at this moment had sunk back in her seat with her head bowed upon her left hand, while her right, holding the pen, hung listlessly over the arm of the chair. Her attitude and expression were full of utter despondency. Her face, in its deep shadow, could not be distinctly seen, but a glimpse of the pale cheek, and the long, thin hand that supported her head, gleamed in ghastly contrast to the blackness of her robes and vail. The door opened gently, and a sweet, glad voice

asked permission to come in. In an instant the face and the attitude of the woman changed. Her head was raised, her eyes lighted up with a sudden glow of unutterable love, and her arms were extended, as she said, in a voice whose every note vibrated with its deep, passionate tenderness,

"Yes, always, my own beautiful darling! Come to my arms my Genevieve!"

With the swift, smooth dart of a bird, Vivia flew to the embrace of her Mother, and nestled there, with her arms around her neck and her cheek against her bosom; while that Mother gazed down upon her blooming face, smoothed the bright hair, and caressed her with many loving words, in the soft tone of some ring-dove cooing to its fledgling.

"Do you love me, my own Genevieve?"

"More than all the world, my dearest Mother. Ah, surely you know it."

"I do, but like to hear you say so. Do you love me as if I were indeed your own mother?"

Vivia was silent, but tried to compensate for her silence by the most tender caresses; until seeing the face of the lady begin to work with suffering, she hastened to say,

"More than any one else in this world that I have ever known, do I love you, lady; but my own dear mother, whom I never saw upon this earth—my sweet, young mother, who died so sadly when she was very little older than I am now—my angel mother, who went to heaven the same hour that I came on earth—you are not sorry that I love her best of all, lady?"

A low, deep sob, and then the Abbess arose, put Vivia gently from her arms, and walked to the fireplace, where she stood with her forehead leaned against the mantle-piece.

"You are not hurt, you are not pained that I love my dear, lost mother as a guardian angel, lady?" asked Vivia, going behind her and putting her arms around her waist.

"No, no," replied the nun, in a choking voice, with her hand clutching at her chest.

"I love you more than all else in the whole world, more than I ever loved Father Francis."

The hand that was disengaged was suddenly waved, quickly, shortly, impatiently, and the Abbess leaving her position, came and reseated herself in her chair. Vivia threw herself down at her feet and laid her head in her lap, taking and caressing her pale, thin hands, saying,

"I will live my love, I will prove it, I will never leave you, Mother."

"My bright angel! the world has many attractions for one like you," said the Abbess, in a trembling voice.

"None strong enough to entice me from my beloved Mother!"

"Ah! my own! I would not accept your promise, did I not know how short my troubled life is like to be—and I would love to have my darling near me while I live, so she would be happy here."

"I am very happy, dearest mother, and I will never, never leave you until your own voice bids me depart."

The pale nun gathered the young girl to her bosom, and strained her to her heart, and called her, her blessing, her darling, her angel, the life of her life, and many fond impassioned names besides.

"A lady to see the Mother Superior," said the voice of the portress at the door.

"Show her in. Go, my darling, my blessed darling, until I get rid of this visitor," said the Abbess, embracing and dismissing Vivia, while the portress went to usher in the guest.

"Ada Malmaison!" exclaimed the Abbess, turning paler than before.

"Yes, Mother Agatha! Ada Malmaison, and not the Demon, as your apalled look would seem to say," replied

the fair visitor, in the sweet, clear monotone that distinguished her.

"Excuse me, madame! pray sit down," apologized the Abbess, recovering herself and offering a chair.

"I thank you, I must avail myself of your civility so far," answered the visitor, taking a seat, "but farther I do not know that it is necessary we should flatter each other. Your first reception of me was probably the most sincere."

"Probably," said the Abbess.

Never was a greater contrast between human beings than there was between these two women.

The Abbess with her dark face that the deep lines of thought, suffering, and passion had aged before its time, and her large, dark, soul-thrilling eyes and deep-toned voice.

The visitor, the fairest of all fair women, and the calmest of all calm creatures, with her snow-white face, so statuesque in its repose, and so polished in its smoothness, and her clear, pure, silvery tones.

They were as opposite in costume as in every thing else —the dark, troubled nun, clothed in the black vail and habit of the convent; the fair, calm visitor, in a light and elegant carriage dress.

"You are waiting to know my business here, Lady Abbess. It is soon told; I came to remove Genevieve."

The Abbess started up with a half suppressed cry that deepened to a groan as she sunk back into her chair.

"You promised that she should stay with me," faltered the unhappy woman.

"What, forever?"

"Ah! you are safe now! You spring the screws upon my heart as you please!"

"What mean you, lady, by these words? That which I ask of you is very simple. Miss Laglorieuse is my ward, and as such should enter the world," said Ada, quietly.

"*She is my child!*" moaned the Abbess, in that deep,

rich, vibrating tone of passionate emotion, as though all the strongest chords of her heart had been swept at once, and wailed forth a whole life time's pent-up agony—"*she is my child!*"

"Dare to claim her, then!"

The words were defiant, but the tones were clear and calm as ever, and contrasted strangely with the burst of passion in which the other exclaimed,

"Woman! or fiend! are you?"

"Which ever you please—but—Abbess, or—*what* are you?"

"MADAME!"

"That does not answer my question."

"Fiend! you are a fiend! You have made my life—not a *desert*—that had been mercy! but a Gehenna of dry bones! a hell of murdered hopes and burning, maddening memories! But, woman! there will come a day when our cause shall be tried before the tribunal of the Highest! Thank God, there is a Judgment Day and a Lake of Fire!"

"A pious aspiration!" said Ada, serenely.

"Not content with having bereft me of Francois, not sated either with having rended Austin from my bosom, and kept him from my sight—"

"Abbess!"

—"You would tear this child also from my bleeding heart!"

"Come, Holy Mother Abbess! Bride of Heaven! what have you to do with family love and vain human affections, renounced at the altar long ago—and guilty now, if entertained in your perjured heart? Do you ever visit the confessional, lady? are these vain repinings and sinful longings poured into the ear of your spiritual guide? Or is there not a reservation like the accursed portion kept back by Ananias and Sapphira?"

"Fiend I say again!" broke from the tortured heart and lips of the nun.

"I will set the Holy Mother Superior of St. Genevieve an example of forbearance, and not return railing for railing," said Ada, calmly; "I remain in the neighborhood for one week longer, at the end of which time I shall call and take Genevieve away and convey her to the city, where I shall stay until the house at Sunset Hills is ready. Good morning, Mother Agatha," concluded the visitor, retiring.

The portress let Mrs. Malmaison out, but had scarcely shut the door behind her, when the sound of a heavy fall arrested her attention, and upon running into the parlor, she found the Abbess stretched upon the floor in a deep swoon.

About the middle of the week, Mrs. Malmaison gave a party to the young people of the neighborhood, and invited, among others, Genevieve, from the Convent, and Blaise and Helen Wildman, from Red Hill. When the invitation arrived for Vivia, the Abbess, who had in the mean time recovered self-command enough to inform the young girl of the impending change in her prospects, said to her, in a voice that she vainly attempted to render steady and cheerful,

"You will see Austin, Mrs. Malmaison's—*heir*, at this ball, my dear child; notice carefully how he looks, how he talks, and whether he seems strong in health, and intelligent and good—so that you may be able to bring me word."

"I will do so, dear Mother, and I will come home early to-morrow morning, for I grudge every hour I spend from you since you tell me I must leave you on Monday. But, must it really be so? Remember, no power but your own shall send me from you."

"Yes, it must be so, my Genevieve! this lady has a claim upon you which I have no power to withstand, nay, that I must support, and it is *I* that bid you go."

"Well, dearest Mother, since it must be so, I will write you every week, and when I shall be of legal age to act for myself, I will come back and remain with you so long as we both shall live."

"I will not allow you to bind yourself by any promise, my child! Only remember that I beg you always to write to me freely about Austin, but do not wonder if, in my letters back, I omit all mention of the youth's name."

"I will follow your directions very carefully, dearest Mother."

Here the conversation ended.

The party at Mount Storm was as pleasant as a party could be, that was almost improvised at that season. It was held all over the house and grounds. And the young people danced in the saloon, took refreshments in the dining-room, or strolled out in couples and trios over the moonlit lawn, and through the shrubberies. As soon as Vivia arrived and missed her friend Theodora, she flew up into the attic, where she found the girl sitting at the window, and watching with interest the groups of young people on the lawn.

"It is an enlivening scene, dear Genie," said Theodora, smiling, as she got up to embrace her friend.

"Yes, it is. Come down with me, and join it."

"Oh, I don't like to. I don't know any body there, you know, and my dress is not fit," said Theodora.

"I can prepare you one," said Vivia.

Then the old chest was overhauled, and a sprigged muslin frock that had belonged to Miss Garland was taken out, and Vivia's nimble fingers, with the aid of needles and thread, soon tucked it up and took it in, while Theodora ran down stairs to heat an iron to press it out. When Theodora was dressed in this frock, Vivia took half the rose-colored ribbons from her own hair and adorned the head of her friend,

and then gayly bade her notice that they were both dressed alike.

And then they went down stairs, and out upon the lawn. As they wandered about together, many joyous young creatures sprang to meet Vivia, and to all of them she introduced her friend Theodora. And many of the youths in turn vied for the honor of her hand in the first dance; but Vivia replied to all that she should not dance in the early part of the evening, and perhaps she should not dance at all. Presently, at a turn in their walk, they came upon Mrs. Malmaison and her son Austin. They made a beautiful pair. Vivia thought so the instant she saw them, while Theodora gazed at them both in the fixed yet unconscious way she had when absorbing from any object all the beauty and inspiration she could draw. Austin was of a fine, tall, slender, yet well-rounded figure, with a stately head covered with a profusion of sunny, bright brown ringlets like those of Vivia, with pure Grecian features, and pale and clear complexion; but whose eyes were those? those large, dark shadowy eyes of such unfathomable depths of mournfulness? and in such strange, sorrowful contrast to his youthful grace and beauty?

When Vivia first saw those eyes she started, and her face flushed and paled, and flushed again, as under the sudden light of a new discovery.

And when Theodora first met their deep, mournful gaze, some profound and hitherto unknown point of sympathy in her own heart was touched, and she felt vaguely but earnestly that she could give up all her own little life's dearest joys to make that other life happy; she dropped her shy eyes directly, but she still seemed to see and feel that mournful gaze that was drawing her very soul from her bosom. All this passed in the few seconds that Mrs. Malmaison was advancing, and presenting—

"My son, Mr. Malmaison, young ladies. Miss Laglori-

euse, who is your friend?" she asked, while Austin was bowing to the girls.

"Mrs. Thogmorton's niece, Theodora, who lives in the same house with you," said Vivia, in great surprise, which did not, however, exceed that of the lady, though the latter betrayed none, only saying,

"Indeed;" and then adding, "I must leave Austin to entertain your friend while I take a turn with you, Genevieve. Shall I do so?"

"I thank you, madame, yes," said Vivia, taking the offered arm of the lady, and walking off with her.

"Genevieve, this is the first time we have met since I left you at the Convent, after taking leave of Father Francis, some six years ago."

"Yes, madame."

"Yet you are aware, I suppose, that I am your only legal guardian?"

"I have been lately told so, madame."

"It was at the earnest solicitation of the Abbess, that I left you at the Convent to be educated during the last six years; but now I think the time has arrived when you should be initiated into the manners and customs of society outside those walls. Therefore, I have concluded to remove you and take you with me to the city.—the Abbess has mentioned this to you before?"

"Yes, madame, she has. May I ask you without offense, lady, how it comes that you are my legal guardian?"

"Assuredly," said Mrs. Malmaison, quietly, "you are my niece."

"Then, aunt, will you tell me something of my parents?"

"Tell me first, how much you know of them?"

"Only this—that my father died before I lived, and that my mother went to Heaven the same hour that I was born."

"Do you know who they were?"

"No, lady; what I have told you, I learned from my first

guardian, Father Francois Laglorieuse, who was also my uncle; although such relationships are ignored, you know, by those vowed to the altar; therefore I call him only my spiritual guardian. He told me what I have told you, and that I should learn more from you."

"Have you ever asked Mother Agatha the questions you have put to me?"

"No, madame."

"Then I refer you to her for all information."

"Lady, I never could speak to her upon this subject."

"Why!"

"I cannot tell you!"

"Then I cannot tell you more of your parents than this—that you bear the name of only one of them."

While this conversation was going on in one part of the lawn, Austin Malmaison had drawn Theodora's arm within his own, and led her down one of the althea walks. The pale, sweet face of this little creature, so different from all the bright young faces around, had interested him at the first sight.

"Did I hear Miss Laglorieuse say that you are staying at Mount Storm?" he asked, as doubting the evidence of his senses.

"Oh yes, it is my home," she replied.

"And I have been here a week—how is it that I have not seen you?" Austin inquired, in a tone gentler even than his usual gentle one, as if to smooth any possible rudeness in the question.

Theodora did not reply, and of course he did not press the inquiry. But after a few minutes Theodora said—

"Since you have been here I have been so very busy with my pictures."

"You paint, then?—but excuse me, I am asking you a great many questions."

"Oh—do—" Theodora began, and then blushing, hesi-

tated. The youth looked down at her delicate face, with its downcast eyelashes sweeping the pale cheek, and thought it the very sweetest face he had ever beheld.

"You were going to say, Theodora—" he began.

"Oh, only that you must not mind asking me any thing you wish to know. I shall be very glad to tell you," she replied in a low voice.

"Thank you, Theodora. Do you mind my calling you Theodora? it is such a beautiful name, of such holy significance as to be a title in itself."

"Oh! no, every one calls me so," she said, in the same low voice.

"Well, then, Theodora, you paint?"

"Yes, a great deal, but not very well; I have had no instructor."

"Except the original great master! the oldest of all old masters—God in Nature!"

Theodora's cheek suddenly flushed, her eyes lightened, and her whole countenance beamed as with the pure electric fire of a glorious inspiration. And Austin, gazing with vailed admiration, thought what a beautifully changeful face it was. He felt very much interested in her, and wished to know her condition, who and what she was exactly, and the reason of her seclusion in the midst of the family; but he hesitated, notwithstanding her expressed permission, and the humility and simplicity of her character, that would not have taken offense at the act, to ask her any questions except upon the subject of her art.

"I would like very much to see some of your pictures if that were permissible, Theodora," he said.

"Oh, indeed, they are not worth looking at. I do not say it as words of course, but because it is true; even I, that paint them, get the heart-ache with looking at their faults," said Theodora, in sudden alarm, raising her eyes deprecatingly to his.

Austin smiled brightly on her at this ingenuous speech, and Theodora cast down her eyes again; but still saw in her soul the beautiful smile that made his face as radiant as inspiration had rendered Theodora's own.

Thus they walked and talked, while in still another part of the garden walked Basil Wildman and his adopted sister Helen. Helen was now about sixteen years of age, and had grown up almost beautiful; so nearly so, that many people said that Helen Wildman had just escaped being the most beautiful girl in the state; while many others thought she had not missed it at all. She was of medium height, with slender figure, lithe, agile, and graceful in all its motions as that of a gazelle or a French danseuse; with an elegant little head of shining jet black hair parted over her forehead, like two folds of black satin, rolled in a knot, and fastened with a silver arrow at the nape of her neck; with eyebrows black and glossy as water leeches, and long, close, black eye-lashes, that vailed large eyes of every imaginable shade and color, as passion, imagination, fancy, or any other quality or emotion of heart or mind affected them; fine eyes that flashed or smoldered, but never melted; with a complexion as dark as an Anglo-Celt's could be, and only warmed in the cheeks and lips with a rich, brilliant glow, caught from the woods and fields, among which her life was passed.

Whether Helen were beautiful or not, she had all the beauty of the family—no share of it had fallen to the lot of Blaise—poor, good-hearted, ill-taught Blaise. He was now about twenty-two years of age, tall and awkward, with large hands and feet, and a large head, covered with a thatch of stiff, red hair, that nothing could persuade to lie down; with a coarse, freckled face, with a forehead so flat, that the bump of benevolence above it looked like a "bump" indeed that had been received by accident in a fall, or by a blow; with a large, short, stumpy nose, a long upper lip, a shape-

less mouth, and a square, protruding under jaw; and lastly, with pale, blue eyes, with their lower lids seeming larger than the upper ones, and having the appearance of shutting upward. Added to which personal attractions his manners were rough, and the best tones of his voice a good-natured growl.

"I wish the dancing would commence! I do so! I am tired to death of this lazy sauntering about," said Helen impatiently, stopping and throwing herself down upon a garden seat.

"Well, it will begin soon," said Blaise, standing before her. This pair had always been inseparable companions and confidential friends. And now, as Blaise stood before Helen, he lowered his growl to a *very* confidential tone, as he said, "Nell! look over yonder at those two walking up the althea walk."

"I see them! the young man is the lion of all this entertainment, and for that very reason the very fellow I mean to lead off the first dance with."

"S'pose he don't ask you?"

"Suppose I make it impossible for him to avoid asking me?"

"Why, how can you do that?"

"Ah! that's the secret that the serpent taught Eve, and Eve bequeathed to all her daughters—do you think I am going to be the first female to let it out? No, sir!"

"Well, never mind the young man, I know him. I have not forgotten Austin Malmaison; but look at that sweet, quiet, gentle little pale-faced creature on his arm?"

"That? oh! the poor little miserable! that's Theodora, Mrs. Thogmorton's niece; Theodora, who believes in saints and angels, and that sort of trumpery; and among the common people in this world hasn't pluck enough to say her soul's her own!" said Miss Helen, scornfully.

"She's not a bit like *you*, Nell! that's a fact! I like the

little creature! I do, indeed; it makes me feel sort o' good and warm about the heart, sort o' religious, you know, to look at her sweet, little pale face and drooping eyelids."

"Don't be a fool, Blaise."

"But I say, Nell! indeed you know I feel as if that little mite of a creature was some kin to me—and I never saw her before to-day," persisted Blaise.

"Now, I wonder if I have all the sense as well as all the good looks in the family!" inquired Miss Helen, with a sneer.

"'Good looks!' burn my buttons! why, has any body been putting it into your head that *you* have good looks? Why you are no more good-looking than a thornapple, a nettle, or prickly pear, or any thing else that one gets out of the way of."

"I should like to know what you call good-looking, then!" exclaimed Miss Helen; "yourself, I suppose."

"Well, yes, I hope I am not *ill*-looking, but if you want to know what I call *real* good-looking, look there at that sweet little creature! She's *real* good-looking—that is if good-looking means looking good!"

Helen tossed her beautiful head disdainfully as Blaise continued to watch the young couple.

"I say, Nell! but by George! he's very sweet with her!" exclaimed Blaise.

"He's a fool!" said Nelly, "a downright, unmitigated *fool*, to be wasting his time on such a little miserable, when—"

—"*You* are on the ground? hey, Nell?"

Helen laughed. While they spoke, Austin led Theodora to a seat near them, and sat down by her side.

"I say, Blaise, I'll tell you what I'll do," said Helen, "and mind you attend and be guided by my wisdom. I'll take you up to Theodora and introduce you. Of course, Mr. Malmaison, seeing me standing, will get up and offer

me *his* seat beside Theodora. I will thank him and take it. *You* then ask Theodora to dance, for the sets are going to form. Now Theodora *never* dances, so she will refuse you, as she has no doubt already refused Mr. Malmaison."

"Well, but if she refuses me, what good to ask her!"

"What a stupid! because that will oblige Mr. Malmaison, standing right before us and looking at me, to ask me, if from nothing but politeness. I shall accept the invitation, and you will remain *tête-à-tête* with little Theodora the whole evening, if you choose, for if the heir escape me, then Eve has disinherited one daughter of her secret. Come!"

The brother and sister arose and went toward the young couple who were the objects of their machinations. And the plan of Helen succeeded so well that in a few minutes she found herself leaning on the arm of Mr. Malmaison, at the head of the leading quadrille, while Blaise was left to terrify little Theodora with his uncouth figure and ugly face, and well meant but blundering attentions. And this lasted all the evening, for Austin Malmaison did *not* escape the thraldom of his beautiful enslaver.

Vivia remained all night, and early the next morning set off on foot for the Convent, keeping along the course of Mad River, under the shadow of the mountain, until she reached Red Ridge, the home of the Wildmans, where she turned into the farm-yard and went up to the house. It was still so early that she found none of the family stirring, except old Mrs. Wildman, who uttered an exclamation of pleasure as Vivia entered.

"I called this morning to take leave of you, Mrs. Wildman. I am going away with Mrs. Malmaison; but I wish to leave with you this comfort—that I had a talk with Austin last evening, and told him all your struggles; and he promised me that as soon as he should reach his majority, he would let you have the farm at the price his father had agreed with you upon, and refund to you all the money that

his guardian has made you pay over and above your rate of rent in his father's time."

"You blessed angel! it is *you* I have to thank for this," said the old lady, warmly grasping her two hands.

"Not at all, it is Austin, and I will tell him how happy he has made you! And now good-by! I shall see you again in spring," exclaimed Vivia, kissing the old lady, and running off. When she reached the Convent gate, she found Wakefield Brunton sitting on the steps of the porter's lodge studying his lesson, but in a very despondent attitude.

"Good morning, Wakefield: how are you getting on?" said Vivia, cheerfully.

"Sadly enough, Miss Genevieve," replied the youth, rising and bowing.

"Why, how is that?"

"I have to stay away from school, and hire out every day that I can get a day's labor; besides that, I have to do the hardest part of the house-work, and all the garden-work. It leaves me scarcely any time for study," said the youth, discontentedly.

"Yet, with all your hinderances, you are very far advanced for one of your age! Wakefield, take courage! better days are just dawning for you. I was talking with Austin Malmaison last evening, about a primary school for boys here. He was interested in the plan, he is so sympathetic and generous; and he has promised that he will have a cheap school-house built for the present, and employ a young man who will be able to teach for the small salary of three hundred dollars a year, which he will pay out of his allowance until he comes of age, when he will be able to enlarge the plan. And, Wakefield, I spoke to him of you, and he authorized me to say that you should have the place, if you wished it. The school-room will be built immediately, and the school opened as soon as it is finished."

To understand the joy this gave, you should have seen

the youth's beaming face, and dancing radiant eyes, that soon melted into tears, as he said—

"How much I have to bless you for!"

"No—it is Austin, that you and many others will have to bless—now, Wakefield, good-by! I am going away on Monday. I shall probably be gone all the autumn and winter, but I shall see you again in the spring, and when I come back I shall find you quite a person in authority."

"Going! are you going away! you!" exclaimed the youth anxiously.

"Yes, Wakefield, I am going with Mrs. Malmaison to the city."

"And with Austin—he is high born, he is wealthy, he is handsome and accomplished, and—and—you have great power with him," cried the youth, faltering, uneasily.

Vivia held out both her hands to him, saying—

"Yes, Wakefield, that is all true—he is my cousin—my *first* cousin you know, which is only one remove from a brother."

"Oh! oh! is he!" exclaimed the other with irrepressible satisfaction.

"Yes," said Vivia severing one sunny curl from her head —"here, Wakefield, keep this in memory of me, until I come back in the spring," and ere the boy could thank her, she put it in his hand with a smile, and ran away.

Vivia entered the private parlor of the Abbess, whom she found, as usual, at her reading and writing table.

The lady arose and opened her arms, and the young girl flew fondly to the offered embrace, and even while they stood thus, the Abbess looking down fondly upon the bright head resting against her own dark draped bosom, Vivia spoke—

"I have scarcely known Austin a day, dear Mother, yet feel as if the time had never been when I was not as intimate with him as now.—And that is because Austin embodies all those fine old ideals of excellence in poetry and

fable with which I have lived familiarly all my life. Perhaps that was the reason also why I possessed the magic key that opened every chamber in the temple of Austin's glorious spirit. I saw all the treasures of his soul. The genuineness of none I doubted, the strength of some I proved. He is enthusiastic, generous, and unselfish to a romantic degree. He is every thing that his most excellent friend could wish him. We shall have great joy in our Austin, Mother! - Come, sit down in your chair! let me sit at your feet and tell you what your Austin is about to do."

"*My* Austin!" exclaimed the Abbess, in surprise and alarm.

Vivia closed the lady's pale and quivering lips with a kiss like a sacred pledge of confidence; and gently urged her into her easy seat, and sat down upon the rug at her feet; and resting her bright head against her lap, began and related all the generous and benevolent intentions of Austin; while the dark-eyed Abbess listened with her heart.

For the few days that they continued to pass together, Vivia cheered the spirits of the desponding lady, and brightened all the future to her hopes.

In the mean time, Austin at Mount Storm, had not failed to improve his acquaintance with the little, delicate, fawn-eyed girl that he had met the previous evening, and had found so interesting. He gained Theodora's confidence, and persuaded her to let him see some of her paintings; and he gradually drew her on to speak, shyly, of her artist hopes and aspirations. And he gained her promise to paint for him a picture, the subject of her own selection, for a Christmas gift And next he gained her permission to select and send to her some fine engravings. He coaxed her out to walk also, and guided her timid footsteps up the loftiest heights of the mountains to the nearly inaccessible but finest points of view. The new friendship springing up between Austin and Theodora excited only a

transient surprise, and all uneasiness was quelled by the reflection :—"Oh, it is nothing but compassion that actuates Austin. It was the same principle in Genevieve's conduct. Both pity the poor little thing, and she is only a child."

And so a few golden days passed—days of deep and earnest interest to the young man's heart; days of new, sweet, strange joy to the gentle girl's life.

And then came the day of departure. And Mrs. Malmaison's superb traveling carriage, occupied by that lady's self, Vivia and Austin, and followed by a second vehicle containing the servants and the baggage, set off from Mount Storm, en route for the city.

And in one month from that day, the doctor, Mrs. Thogmorton, and Miss Garland accepted an invitation from Mrs. Malmaison, and left Mount Storm for a visit of some weeks. And Theodora was left alone with the servants who were in charge of the old mansion.

CHAPTER XXI.

YOUNG LOVE.

Maiden! since we met thee last,
O'er thy brow a change hath past;
In the softness of thine eyes,
Deep and still a mystery lies;
From thy voice there thrills a tone,
Never to thy childhood known.—*Hemans.*

THEODORA was alone at Mount Storm; alone with her beautiful and glorious dreams. A new inspiration animated her genius, and a new feature appeared in her pictures. Now she scarcely needed Vivia's life-giving touch to make her figures speak. There was the new glow of vitality through all her works, for now a life-giving power was

breathed into her own spirit—breathed through those who loved her into life. Vivia and Austin loved her and found pleasure in her pictures, and now to realize the heavenly visions of her soul for those two alone was happiness enough.

One creation began to dawn upon her canvas—at once an ideal picture and a true portrait—a work that in its progress absorbed her whole soul, yet one that she would have instinctively covered on hearing a footstep in the sanctuary of her attic studio.

One morning she stood before her easel contemplating, studying, and touching this picture here and there as inspiration guided. She was wholly wrapped in her work—every faculty of mind and body—seeing, hearing, feeling, thought—was held in abeyance or was concentrated upon her picture. She heard no footstep, no door open, saw no human form, perceived no presence near until a hand seized her picture from its stand, and a voice laughed aloud, exclaiming,

"I do declare, Theodora, if you haven't painted Austin Malmaison's portrait!"—said Helen Wildman, the last person in the world whom she could have wished to see in her sanctuary, stood laughing immoderately at the consternation she had caused.

"Please to put it down, Helen! Oh! dear, please do put it down," pleaded Theodora.

And when Miss Wildman perceived that she was not only surprising but really distressing the girl, she replaced the picture and gazed at her soberly, seriously, searchingly, and from her to the portrait, and back and forth several times, until Theodora's pale face grew crimson under the infliction.

But whatever was passing in Helen's mind upon the subjects of her scrutiny remained for the present her own secret, she only said,

"I was looking from your work to your face, Theodora,

to see if I could find out where the secret of your skill lies, but I cannot find it; there is nothing in your little face to promise any thing of the sort. I wonder why I can't make pictures, too. Why can't I, do you think?"

"I suppose it is because you don't love to make them as I do," answered the young artist.

Helen had thrown down her beaver hat, and dropped herself into a chair near the fire-place, where a little cheerful wood fire was burning.

Theodora reversed her picture on her easel, and drew a chair near that of Helen, to keep her company while she should remain.

I cannot take upon me to state the relative proportions in the mixed motives of *ennui*, caprice, and benevolence that sent Miss Wildman to see the lonely little recluse; but I know that she credited herself with benevolence *alone*—and that before she left, *another*, and by far the most powerful motive, was added to her incentives to cultivate the acquaintance of the girl artist. "I thought you would be lonesome here, Theodora, and so I just ran over to see how you were getting along. I do think it was shocking in your uncle and aunt to leave you in the house with no one but the negroes for company."

"But they are trustworthy servants, Helen; and I am very well satisfied!"

"Well! but you must not mope. You must come over to Red Ridge and see me often, won't you?"

"Thank you! May-be! I cannot promise!"

"Oh! but you *will* promise! Come *once!* just *once;* I will come and fetch you," pleaded Helen.

In those days and in that neighborhood animal magnetism had never been heard of.

Now Helen Wildman unconsciously possessed and exercised a very high degree of magnetic power. Helen knew of course that she had a very strong will of her own, and

that it generally had its way; yet, in her ignorance of magnetism, or rather of the *name* of magnetism, she often wondered why it was that people yielded to her so readily. And poor little Theodora, on her part, had an extremely delicate, susceptible, impressible nature, and *she* too, in *her* ignorance of magnetism, wondered how now she yielded to Helen against her own better judgment. Helen turned the conversation to the party at which they had last met, and then by easy gradations to Austin Malmaison, and the days he had spent at Mount Storm, and the walks and talks he had had with Theodora. And the young recluse, though with most persons and upon nearly all occasions, singularly shy and reserved, now found herself, against her better reason, yielding up to Helen's demand, all the external facts of her late life's history; how Austin had taken an interest in her pictures, how he coaxed her out and guided her trembling feet up to the mountain heights to the grand views she had never seen before; and how she was to paint a picture for him, and to receive soon a roll of fine engravings.

At the end of an hour Helen concluded her visit. When she reached home that evening she said to her brother—

"Blaise! if you care any thing about that little caprice of yours, you had better look after her! Austin Malmaison has taken a fancy to her, just as sure as I stand here telling you of it!"

"I don't believe it! she is such a mere child! the little, little creature!"

"So she is, yet *you* fell in love with her."

"Golly! so I did, Nell! I never thought of that! But she don't care for Austin! Don't now, Nell! don't say she does! she's too little, you know! such a tiny, tiny girl."

"No, she don't care for him yet; except as a sort of second Vivia. She loves Vivia and Austin as though they were her brother and sister; but though her love for Vivia

can never change, her affection for Austin may. Now listen to me, Blaise! 'make hay while the sun shines;' the present is your very best opportunity. That dainty young gentleman is necessarily out of the way; the coast is clear, the girl's heart is free, her hand is disengaged, and—I should love her for a sister-in-law, and I will help you, to the best of my ability, to obtain her."

"But she is so young yet—*the little, little creature,*" said Blaise, dwelling fondly on these last words; "and if I should court her in earnest now, it might frighten her and set her against me, so that I might never get her."

"Oh! Heaven mind your wits! you need not frighten her; but you can begin to be very good to her, can you not? and I will be with you to play propriety—"

—"*You* play propriety!"

—"And to keep you in countenance. And when Mrs. Thogmorton comes home, she will begin to have an idea! And she will be on your side. And you will continue to go there. And so your marriage with Theodora will gradually grow to be considered a settled thing, and Theodora will no more find strength of mind enough to object to it, than she would to oppose the sun coming up, or any other fore-ordained event in nature. And so you'll get her in proper time."

Blaise mused awhile and then said,

"I don't think she fancied me at the party. But then she might fancy me better on a longer acquaintance. Anyhow, if she don't like me at first, if I only get her, I shall be so good to her, I shall be such a slave to her, that she can't help liking me, though I mayn't be so rich, or so good-looking, and soft-spoken, and book-learned as *some.* And I know myself, if I was the richest, and the learnedest, and the best-looking man in the state, I couldn't love Theodora any better than I do—and if I had the pick of the

whole country, I couldn't look away from her little, little face!"

"There! I am not Theodora! Only do as I say, and you'll get her; and afterward, Blaise, if you don't make her happy as the day is long, I myself, I—seeing she has no one else to take her part—will call you to account for it; I dreamt once of killing a man in a duel!"

"I! *I* ever neglect or ill-treat *her*, seeing I may be so near Heaven as to get her? Why, look here, Nell! I'd cut my tongue out and bait fish-hooks with it, before it should speak one word that wasn't loving to that little, shrinking creature."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Helen, who felt that she had rather a difficult account to settle with her own conscience for these machinations.

Diana of the Woods, as she was, Helen had let her wild heart escape her own custody, and fall captive to the handsome heir of Mount Storm, and consequently had quite a personal interest in the success of Basil's suit to Theodora.

Helen was full as good as her word, and quite surprised at her own success. She visited Theodora frequently, caressed her fondly, and made herself in some sort necessary to the loving, clinging nature of the solitary child. She drew her sometimes out to spend a day and night at Red Ridge; and when the season deepened into winter, and the hunting season commenced, she used all the influence she possessed to persuade Theodora to join herself and Blaise and Wakefield in their hunting expeditions.

She had an additional motive for enticing her little friend to make one of these parties; it was this: she at her present age of young womanhood, began to feel conscious of a certain indelicacy in being the only female in a party of hunters, even though one of that party was her own elder brother. This feeling was not strong enough to conquer her passion for wild sports; but it was quite enough to

make her very much in earnest in trying to persuade Theodora to become her companion in them.

And in this attempt Helen was more successful than she had dared to hope. For apart from the magnetic power of the beautiful and self-willed gipsy over the gentle, susceptible nature of the lonely child, there was a picturesque and romantic aspect about the wild life of the brave, adventurous girl, that possessed a strong attraction for the young enthusiast. The artist-mind of Theodora very highly appreciated the handsome and spirited Helen. She sketched her twice, first as the goddess Diana, and next as Die Vernon; and the latter she transferred to her canvas to finish in her best style of art.

There was no one to oppose Helen's influence over Theodora; she had the whole field to herself, and took possession, of course. Sometimes Theodora felt that neither Vivia nor Austin would approve of her joining the unfeminine sports of Helen Wildman; but this was a dim, distant, almost unreal instinct; while the opposing influence of Helen was very strong, near and real.

When Helen had one of these hunting parties in view, she usually came over in the afternoon to Mount Storm, and coaxed Theodora to return with her to Red Ridge, and from that place enticed her off early the next morning, if they were going after rabbits or birds, or at night if the coon were the object of pursuit. The party usually consisted of Helen, Basil, Theodora, Wakefield, one of the negro men, and a couple or two of pointers and setters.

Theodora was only half willing and half afraid when making one of these expeditions, and was ever striving to conquer the girlish tendencies of her heart, as if to be sensitive and full of compassion were something to be ashamed of and to be overcome.

It was a curious point to observe that both Basil and Wakefield treated Helen with an off-hand indifference, as

though she had been a third boy, which indeed they seemed to consider her, while they addressed themselves to serve and assist Theodora as though she were the only girl of the party, in some strange, involuntary way cast among them. And this went on until Helen suddenly woke to the knowledge that, with all her beauty, she was not now receiving, and that she never had received, her "dues" of service and respect from the boys. This first roused her wrath, and then set her to searching for the cause, which she was not long in finding. It was not in her nature to permit this neglect to continue, so that she became as troublesome and as exacting as she could possibly be.

Basil's jealousy awoke about the same time. It gave him the greatest uneasiness when Wakefield anticipated him in helping Theodora over a fence or up a steep. And in rejoining the little girl, in passing Wakefield, he would whisper gruffly,

"Go help Helen, can't you!"

And Wake would look at him in a sort of amazement, and go and do as he was bid—which, by-the-way, would not prevent him from flying to the assistance of Theodora at the very next opportunity. And this continued until Basil could endure it no longer, and was forced to take an occasion to say to his companion,

"Wakefield, we have been friends a good many years. Now I want you to do me a favor. Just you attend to yourself, or to Nelly, or to any thing else you like, only leave little Daughter to me."

Wakefield looked searchingly in the rugged, irregular face of his friend a moment, and then with the involuntary exclamation of "It isn't possible!" gave the required pledge.

And thenceforth in all their expeditions, Wakefield became the beau-cavalier of Helen, and Basil devoted himself to Theodora. Considerate, tender, and delicate as his rough,

untutored nature permitted him to be, was Basil in his attentions to the young girl. He called her "Daughter." And Theodora grew to like him in the character of a sort of a rugged young bear of a father or elder brother; just upon the same principles that she looked upon old Pharaoh as an antediluvian "uncle." She certainly never remotely dreamed of Blaise as a lover; such an idea would have frightened her forever from the party. Blaise, though very obtuse in most respects, had in some blundering manner stumbled upon the knowledge of this truth, and therefore he continued to call her "Daughter," and was careful to keep up the fiction of his assumed paternal relation to hide the fact of his real position in regard to her. Thus passed the autumn and the first weeks of winter.

It was drawing near Christmas, when one day Theodora, sitting sewing at her garret window, saw Blaise Wildman driving a carriage up the winding road that led to Mount Storm. She saw that there was a deal box in the cart, but felt too little interest to wonder about it. The cart, as it approached the house, wound up out of her line of vision, and passed also out of her thoughts, until there was a rap at the door, and old Pharaoh put his head in and said,

"Miss Theodora, chile, here's Marse Basil Wileman come long o' some box for you, out'n Eyrie."

In much perplexity and doubt Theodora hurried down stairs, where she found Basil standing in the hall giving directions to two negro men who were bringing in a packing box.

"How dy'do, little Daughter? I was at Eyrie this morning, and happened to see at the commission store this big box that come down from the city for you. So I just gave the fellow an acknowledgment for it, and got it put upon my cart and brought it over. Where did it come from? who sent it? what's in it, Daughter?"

"Indeed I don't know any thing at all about it, and I

can't think!" said Theodora, stooping down to read her name and address in full upon the top.

"There is no mistake, you see!" said Blaise.

"No. Austin promised to send me a roll of engravings; but I expected them through the post-office in the same way that I get the drawing paper that Vivia sends. Open the box, Mr. Blaise, and see what is in it."

"That's easier said than done, Daughter; but we'll try. Here! you fellows! get me a strong chisel, and a big hammer and a hatchet."

When the tools were brought and the box opened and unpacked, it was found to contain, first a packet of very fine engravings, then a packet of books treating upon the art of painting, a parcel of drawing paper, leaf ivory, and prepared canvas, a large mahogany box of the best oil colors, a box of the finest water colors, several sheaves of paint brushes and pencils—and lastly, a fine black walnut silver-mounted easel, in three parts, that could be easily set up or taken down, and packed if necessary in a very small compass.

Theodora was so undemonstrative that no one could have guessed her intense delight and wonder at the possession of these treasures. They seemed to her a fortune, whose value was not to be computed or realized, the reception of which must form an era in her life and color all her destiny. While with beating heart and beaming eyes she contemplated her wondrous wealth, *Blaise* was contemplating *her*, and wishing that he himself had had the money and the knowledge and the forethought to have procured her this happiness—and he could not help exclaiming jealously,

"The doctor is wonderful good all of a sudden!"

"The doctor! dear me, it was not the doctor, but Mr. Malmaison that sent them!"

"Mr.—" Blaise repressed the malediction that arose to his lips. This was worse than before.

Theodora began to fill her arms with as many of her treasures as she could carry to remove them up stairs. And Blaise conquered his ill-humor, and helped her to carry them to her attic. And then helped her to set up her easel, and arrange her other articles, and he promised to make oaken frames for her pictures, and hang them for her, and then reluctantly took his leave.

That night Theodora could not close her eyes for joy. And the next day she was up with the first dawn of morning to review her riches. But in the course of the following afternoon Helen came over, and used all her arts of persuasion to take Theodora off to Red Ridge for the evening.

Upon the first of January the doctor and his family returned, unexpectedly, accompanied by Mrs. Malmaison and Vivia, but not by Austin, who remained behind at College. Mrs. Malmaison had run up only for a week's sojourn to give directions about the interior adornment of her mansion, that was now nearly completed. The meeting between Vivia and Theodora was full of emotion, especially on the part of the latter, as if they had been separated for years.

Vivia also had her private mission down in the valley—this was as Austin's substitute, to pay the workmen the balance due for finishing and furnishing the little schoolroom, and see the young teacher duly inaugurated. Vivia took Theodora with her wherever she went to superintend this business, which with equal promptitude and skill she soon completed. Every day also she contrived to spend some hours at the Convent, to cheer and enliven the sad heart of the Abbess.

Vivia had not been many days in the valley, before she learned with surprise and pain, the growing intimacy between her little Dora and the young Wildmans; and she was still more shocked and grieved to find that Theodora had been drawn in to join their reckless sports. True Vivia reflected that the lonely and isolated girl, with her depend-

ent and clinging nature, must inevitably have been attracted by Helen's *trenchant*, courageous individuality, and so she wondered less than she grieved. But she expostulated with Theodora—

"I do not ask you, love, to break with Helen, for that would scarcely be just; but join no more of their huntings. You have not been accustomed to such things; you are not like Helen, who has all her life been the companion of her brother's amusements of every kind. But your nature is too delicate for such rude associations, and your little frame too fragile for such violent and dangerous sports," she would say as she tenderly, protectingly embraced her protege.

And Theodora resolved that she would follow Vivia's counsel. Alas! for good resolutions.

At the end of the week, Vivia having seen young Wakefield Brunton fairly established at the head of his little school of fifteen pupils, and having bidden adieu to the Abbess, and bestowed her parting kiss upon Theodora, departed with Mrs. Malmaison for the city.

As soon as the field was clear, the temptress reappeared. Helen found great difficulty in re-establishing her power over Theodora,—it took time and perseverance; but she succeeded at last. She coaxed her over to Red Ridge, to spend a few days. Mrs. Thogmorton favored the visit, and Theodora went. During her stay a snow-storm arose, and still further protracted her visit.

It was the second day after the storm, when the ground was all covered with snow, that being Saturday and a holiday, Wakefield Brunton came to Red Ridge, to invite Blaise Wildman to go upon the mountain and shoot partridges. Blaise readily consented, and Helen volunteered to be of the party, and set herself to coax and worry Theodora into joining her. It was in vain that Theodora endeavored to plead off. Helen would hear of no refusal. Theodora

alone, with no one to sustain her, had little inherent power of resistance, and she reluctantly consented.

It was still quite early in the morning when they set forth. It was very cold and the narrow way frozen hard, and the surface was so slippery, that it was difficult for them to walk on the level ground, and very dangerous on the mountain side.

The young men trod firmly and safely. And Helen stepped with a free, elastic, sure foot. But Theodora moved tremblingly, with fearful uncertainty—often slipping, sometimes falling, and always pale and trembling, yet ashamed to betray her timidity and awkwardness beside the courage, grace, and agility of the spirited Helen. Basil helped Theodora as much as possible, carefully supporting and guiding her footsteps, until they began to ascend the mountain by the narrow path that obliged them to walk in single-file.

It was upon the summit of the ridge that the sport begun, and continued with great success for two hours or more. Necessarily the party was frequently separated, and scattered over the ridge. In the excitement of the sport, Theodora, who was only a spectator, was often forgotten by every one but Blaise, who never went far from her side.

But at last toward the end of the morning's amusement, Helen with her powder-flask and shot-pouch empty, and her game-bag full, returned to the side of her friend, where Blaise, with his two dogs, his gun and his spoils, already stood waiting. Wakefield, the old negro, and their pointers, had not yet made their appearance ; but Blaise said—

"We will not wait for them to come, Helen. Just as likely as not they have started a hare, that has led them miles away from this. And Daughter is so pale with fatigue and cold and fright and what not, that she looks ready to die; so we will take her home directly."

They immediately began to descend the mountain side, and Blaise assisted Theodora with the utmost tenderness and

care, until they had gone a few yards in the descent, when suddenly a flock of partridges sprang up almost in their path, and flew on before them. Blaise forgot every thing else in his sportsman's instinct, and raising his gun, shot into the flock, bringing down several birds, that fell at various distances—then he ran, springing from point to point down the precipice, after the dogs that had dashed on before. He was soon out of sight, though not quite out of hearing, as he shouted—

"Come on, girls!"

Helen took him at his word, and crying—"Come on, Theodora!" lightly dropped from crag to crag by the aid of the cedar bushes, and then sped down the mountain-path. Theodora attempted to follow, going timidly, cautiously, holding by the saplings to steady herself, but almost afraid to let go, and drop as Helen did, least she should not be able to stop. So she went on in fear and trembling for a few yards, giddy when she dared to look at the precipice below her feet, till at last, in going down a very steep and slippery place, her feet suddenly flew from under her, her frail clasp upon a dry sapling was jerked away, and she was precipitated to the rocks below. One wild terrific scream, uttered in falling, had reached the ear of Blaise, and almost palsied the heart in his bosom, for he at once divined its cause.

Instantly by a great effort recovering his panic, he rushed back upon the mountain-path, looking right and left, and soon came upon the form of Theodora stretched upon the rocks, blood-stained, pale, insensible, perhaps dead! With a terrible cry, he threw himself down beside her, and raised her form in his arms. His frantic cries had reached Helen, who now came running to the spot, where she found Blaise supporting the head of Theodora, and beside himself with terror and despair, crying—

"Oh! Nell! Nell! she's dead! she's dead!—Dora! Theo!

Daughter! Little Daughter! Oh! darling! breath again! open your sweet eyes! Ah! Nell! Nell! we've murdered her, and I shall go hang myself!" and more frantic words like these.

"I don't believe it! she has not fallen twenty feet; she's only stunned, she'll come to presently," said Helen, kneeling beside the insensible form, slipping her from Basil's arms upon her own lap, and bidding her brother to run for some water from the nearest spring, while she loosened her clothes.

Blaise hastened to do as he was bid, bringing the water in his cap, and then kneeling down and bathing the face of the fainting girl.

But Theodora showed no signs of recovery.

"Where is your pen-knife, Blaise?" inquired Helen, stripping up the arm of the victim, and binding it tightly with her handkerchief, until the veins in the hollow of her elbow knotted up like blue cords—"Where is your pen-knife, Blaise?"

Either Blaise did not know what she was doing, or did not see the point of her question, for he paid no attention to her, continuing to bathe the face of Theodora, even while Helen quietly rifled his pockets, possessed herself of the pen-knife, unclasped and tried its sharpest blade, and then with a firm, resolute hand, proceeded to open the vein of Theodora's arm. The blood began to flow, the injured girl opened her eyes just as Blaise perceived what Helen was about.

"What a butcher!" he cried, indignantly.

"Hush! she is recovering," said Helen, proceeding to loosen the ligature about the arm, that the tide might ebb, while she bound up the wound.

"Recovering! oh! thank Heaven! Theodora! my little Dora? How are you, Daughter?"

Theodora languidly lifted her eyelids, but with a look

of sickness and suffering, as though she could not tolerate the light, she dropped them quickly."

"She has had a concussion of the brain! I know by the looks of her eyes that she has," said Helen.

"You—you've hurt her arm! that's it! You—you've no more tenderness than a—than a Mohawk! gashing at her tender vein with a penknife!" said Blaise, furiously.

"I've saved her life! and that's all the credit I get for it! However, I didn't expect any credit. See now if you can lift her gently in your arms, and bring her along toward home. Thank Heaven, the remainder of the descent is easy."

Basil lifted the light form of the suffering girl, and bore her tenderly down the mountain-path.

She gave no further sign of consciousness, except when as her bruised and broken frame received an unavoidable jar by the roughness of the road, she would breath forth a low moan, that went like a sword through the bosom of her carrier.

He took her at once to Red Ridge, where the frightened family took charge of her, while he sprang on his horse and galloped over to Mount Storm and brought the doctor and Mrs. Thogmorton.

They found Theodora very severely injured. Upon the bed, hastily prepared for her by Miss Elizabeth Wildman, she lay seemingly a mere shattered wreck. It was impossible to remove her to Mount Storm. She must remain where she lay. The doctor stayed with her all day and all night, using his utmost skill to save her fluctuating life.

But for two weeks Theodora's death was daily expected. And two months had elapsed, and April had come, before the poor girl could be placed on a feather bed, laid in a cart upon springs, and removed to Mount Storm. Her aunt wished to put her in one of the bed-chambers on the same floor with herself, but Theodora, begged to be con-

veyed to her dear old attic, where she could see her pictures around her on the wall, and see through the windows far over the mountain and valley scene. And the doctor also thought, that in her excessively nervous and excitable state, she would be better off in that remote quarter of the house, where she would certainly be free from noise and disturbance. So thither she was conveyed.

Through all Theodora's illness it was really distressing to see Blaise. Of all creatures he was the most afflicted. He scarcely ate, or slept, or rested for one moment. With the most haggard expression of anxiety, he hung upon the doctor's looks and words. And his own life forces seemed to ebb or flow as Theodora grew worse or better. After her removal to Mount Storm, he came over regularly every day, and often twice a day, to inquire after her, sometimes begging Mrs. Thogmorton, for "heaven's sake," to let him go up and see Theodora. And Mrs. Thogmorton granted his petition as often as she thought proper to do so. At first that lady ascribed Basil Wildman's deep distress about Theodora's illness to an excessive and morbid remorse, but after a little while she discovered the truth of his attachment to the young girl, and in a confidential chat with her daughter Rose, she said,

"It will not be such a bad match for Theodora, in case she recovers her health, poor thing, which, by the way, is very doubtful; however! if she ever does get upon her feet again, I will do all that I can to promote the marriage—after awhile, my dear! of course, I mean after awhile, Theodora is quite too young at present, but in a year's time I think it might do, for you know it would be very absurd in me to permit Theodora to throw away a good opportunity of settling herself for a mere scruple of youth."

By the last of April, Mrs. Malmaison's splendid new mansion at the Sunset Hills was completely finished and superbly furnished throughout.

And upon the first of May, Mrs. Malmaison, accompanied by Vivia, and attended by all her servants, arrived there to spend the summer.

Austin did not come with his mother. He was still at college, and was not expected home until the summer vacation should commence.

Upon the day after her arrival, Vivia hastened over to Mount Storm to see her suffering friend. She found her on the cot-bed in the attic. This was the third month since Theodora's accident, and she was not yet able to walk. Perhaps the first tear that Vivia ever shed, was dropped upon this pale and broken human flower before her.

"Don't weep, dear Vivia! I know what you are thinking of! the doctor has told you that I shall be a cripple for life. Well, dear, it will not make so much difference after all, for I never *was* strong enough to have much use of myself!"

"Oh! Theodora!"

"Besides, dear, it all came from my own feebleness of will! I never had the moral courage to say 'No,' Vivia! but now heaven has once and forever said 'No!' for me! Do not weep."

"I will not. I was wrong to weep. All is for the best, since Heaven permits it. You will get better, my dear Theodora. I know you will. You will soon be out of that bed. Nay! indeed you shall. And though a little lameness may cling to you for some time, yet that infirmity will not interfere with the very best cultivation of your beautiful gift of painting. Nay! on the contrary, it will favor it —it will wed you the closer to it! Come! cheer up! I mean to spend the greatest portion of my time with you," said Vivia, stooping and imprinting a kiss upon the pale forehead of her friend.

And from that morning Vivia daily visited Theodora, and spent several hours with her in cheerful conversation,

reading, or in singing to the accompaniment of a guitar. And the delicate invalid began to recover hope and life and strength. When Theodora was able to sit for hours propped up in the bed, without fatigue, Vivia, as a new means of interesting and amusing her patient, began to give her lessons on the guitar. Theodora was an apt pupil, and the amimating influence of her progress in this charming science contributed greatly to her rapid recovery. In a few weeks Theodora, supported in the arms of Vivia, was able to ride out daily. And by the first of June, leaning on the arm of Vivia, and assisted by a crutch, she was enabled to take short walks around the garden and shrubberies. But notwithstanding her improvement, the opinion of the doctor was confirmed, that Theodora was to be a cripple for life.

CHAPTER XXII.

VIVIA'S VOTARIES.

In vain the sage with retrospective eye
Would from the apparent "what," conclude the "why,"
Infer the motive from the deed, and show
That what we *chanced* was what we *meant* to do.—*Pope.*

Wakefield Brunton was a very zealous young teacher. His own long hunger after knowledge had taught him compassion for other poor boys growing up in ignorance, and made him very devoted in his duties as an instructor. And though there were few, perhaps none among his pupils who would sympathize with his own enthusiastic love of learning, yet with such an earnest master the school could not but prosper.

Wealthy gentlemen of the immediate neighborhood,

moved by the example of young Austin Malmaison, contributed their portion to the support of the enterprise.

Wakefield considered himself only the leader of a little caravan of pilgrims to the temple of knowledge, and bound to keep in advance of his followers. Therefore he devoted every spare shilling and every leisure moment to the increase of his stock of learning. The hours before and after school and in the intermissions were given to study. And any one passing the school-house early in the morning, at noon, or in the evening, might have seen through the open door or windows, a solitary young man absorbed in reading.

It was well for Wakefield, that a distance of three miles separated his home and his school-room, and that the obligation of early rising, and a long, brisk walk, twice daily, together with the necessity of hard manual labor in the garden or at the wood pile, every night and every Saturday, was continually upon him to counteract the ill-effects of so much confinement and such severe application to study.

It was better still for him, that when, from severe toil, depressed and morbid, he was inclined to forget the goods and magnify the ills of his position, he had Vivia with her divine alchemy to transmute his discontent to rejoicing, by convincing him that the inconveniences that disturbed, were also the blessings that saved him. Vivia was the sun of his world. And when her visible presence was not with him, her spirit still possessed, animated his soul, a living spring of inspiration.

Vivia was now the most brilliant attraction in the circle of youth, beauty and genius that the fine taste of Mrs. Malmaison had collected at her elegant summer seat at Sunset Hills. She was, besides, the inapproachable prima donna of the fine concerts held in Mrs. Malmaison's drawing-room. Yet Vivia loved best of all to get away from the gay vanities, and fly to hover over her protege at Mount Storm.

Theodora must have been considered very beautiful, but

for the accident that had crippled her. And even as it was, a peculiar beauty and interest invested the lame girl. Her form was rather under the medium size, but perfectly symmetrical, and when in repose exquisitely graceful. All the features of her fair face were fine and small, except the broad, white forehead, and the large, dreamy hazel eyes, ever vailed by the long and drooping lashes. Slender, arched eyebrows, and soft, wavy brown hair, plainly parted over the crown of her head, harmonized well with the delicate, transparent paleness of her complexion. But her greatest charm lay in the expression of patient suffering in her sweet intellectual face. And when she moved, her little limp suggested only the thought of some crippled bird, and drew the heart toward her with irresistible sympathy.

Theodora continued to make great progress in her painting, though as yet her productions could not be classed with works of art. She earnestly desired that when Mrs. Malmaison should return to the city, she might be permitted to accompany that lady, and remain with her to take lessons from some metropolitan artist. But Mrs. Thogmorton would not for one moment listen to such a proposition. Under this disappointment, Theodora's spirits must have sunk, but that Vivia sustained them with such encouraging words as these—

"The Father who endowed you with your beautiful gift, Theodora, placed you also in the midst of the most glorious inspirations. The source of all life, and Nature, his great medium, are with you. Need you seek masters while the fount whence all the greatest masters drew their inspiration and their power is accessible to you also? Why should you go out of your way to obtain from secondary agencies what you may have from the fountain head? The only difference that the absence of masters to instruct you will make is this—that whatever you may become, you never will be a copyist; your pictures will not be imitations but

living originals." And Theodora hearing this, smiled, believed and persevered.

Doctor Thogmorton and his family began to take pride in and also derive profit from Theodora's genius. The walls of the house, whence Mrs. Malmaison had removed her choice works of art, were now again adorned with Theodora's pictures. As Mrs. Thogmorton supplied the young artist with materials for her painting, and afterward had the latter framed and hung up, she considered that she had thereby purchased and possessed the exclusive right to them —an appropriation on the lady's part that Theodora was far too diffident and gentle to resist.

The young enthusiast not only covered the bare walls of the old house with her historical and landscape pictures, and painted portraits of each member of the family, but also, as Mrs. Thogmorton proffered her niece's professional services to all her particular friends, Theodora was compelled to take likenesses of all the neighbors besides. Her portraits were very popular; for though she never intended to flatter her sitters, yet it was in the very nature of her genius to idealize her subjects, to develop and illustrate any hidden beauty that might be there, and even where there was none, to throw over the poor and barren reality the beauty, dignity, and splendor of her own soul. And this would be done not only involuntarily, but so truthfully that not one individual peculiarity or feature of the original would be lost in the portrait, however idealized the latter might be. Thus in her hands Doctor Thogmorton's stiffness became the dignity of a sage, Rose Garland's levity the joyousness of Hebe, Helen Wildman's eccentricities the grace and freedom of Diana—and Vivia's inspiring smile—ah! there she paused. It was impossible to idealize, or even to equal the reality of Vivia. And the reason of this was, that Vivia refused to meddle with her own portrait. She, whose life-giving hand, with a stroke of that pencil that in her fingers

became a magic wand, could make the dumbest subject eloquent, refused to touch her own portrait; so that the young artist who could idealize and glorify every other subject, could never hope to approach the heavenly beauty of her inspirer.

In the mean time Theodora would have done much better if she had sold these earlier productions of her easel, even for window-blinds and fire-screens, and devoted the price to the purchase of "good and sufficient" clothing. For though she painted portraits for all the friends of the family, no one ever ventured to tender any form of remuneration to the young artist, who, toiling all day and late into the night, month after month, was so poor, that her very best clothing was so excessively shabby as to be a constant source of trouble and mortification. All Vivia's ingenuity and Theodora's industry could not make old clothes look well forever. And often, when the very best care had been taken to make Theodora's poor dress look well, even Mrs. Thogmorton would be put to the blush by the poverty-stricken appearance of her niece before her sitters. But the lady would try to cover her confusion under a laugh and a declaration that—

"Artists are always proverbially slovenly."

Theodora never even in thought resented this injustice; but on the contrary endeavored to palliate their fault to her own conscientiousness, by imagining the embarrassment her neighbors might feel in offering any sort of compensation for service to the niece of a lady who evidently thought it degrading to woman to work in any manner for remuneration. She also sought to excuse the short-comings of her aunt by reflecting upon the unhappy blending of pride and poverty in her family, and the great difficulty they daily contended with in the unnecessary business of keeping up appearances before that bugbear, the world. So in the midst of unrequited toil and many privations, she kept the

sweetness of her temper undisturbed, though to do so she half-blinded her own moral sense. An error, that. We may judge as mercifully, or forgive as freely as we please, but we may not apologize, or excuse, or palliate wrong-doing in another, more than in ourselves. To do so habitually were to cherish a false charity that would end in obscuring our own conscientiousness. Look at a wrong clearly, judge it righteously, and forgive it freely.

Basil Wildman was a frequent visitor at Mount Storm. He was welcomed and encouraged by Mrs. Thogmorton and her family. But he did not often see Theodora, or ever see her alone. And she remained in blissful ignorance of his pretensions. Several circumstances combined to blind the young girl to the aspirations of her clumsy admirer—the abstracted, dreamy and retired life she led—all her intellect and imagination being concentrated upon her art—all her affections and sympathies absorbed by Vivia, and one other as dear though absent—together with the external facts that Basil was the most reserved and awkward of all timid and self-doubting lovers, and that he was also further restrained from making any demonstration by the policy of his sister Helen, who constantly warned him against venturing any advances toward the hand of Theodora, until her guardian spirit Vivia, should be out of the neighborhood. So Basil sighed and submitted, saying,

"Any body might not believe it, Nell, but I do love her, poor dear little dove, a great deal more now than I did before she was crippled. And when I see her rise to cross the room and limp so painfully, oh! how I long—how my very heart yearns for the privilege of raising that little helpless form in my arms, and carrying her whither she would go, and telling her how precious she is to me; how precious beyond price every glance of her sweet eyes, and every cadence in her voice, and how I would pour out the last drop of my heart's blood, if that would restore her to health.

I only want her, my precious love, to take the best care of her, and make her the happiest little darling in the whole world."

"I declare, Blaise, you have improved in your language since you have known Theodora. Where did you ever hear the word 'cadence' before?"

"Oh! don't repulse me with your jests, Nell! I think my heart would burst, if I could not speak to some one; and to whom but to you, Nell? It does me a shadow of the same good as if I had leave to speak to Theodora herself."

"I wonder if any body will ever love me so?"

"You! you, Nell! ha, ha, ha! no, of course not! what an idea!"

"Yet I am much handsomer than Theodora, 'though I say it as hadn't oughter say it,' and I have the use of all my limbs besides."

"So you may be, and so you may have—but—"

"But what!"

"I can't tell," replied Blaise, who always knew more and felt more than ever he could utter.

And here the conversation ended.

The summer vacation arrived. At the University Commencement, Austin Malmaison graduated with great eclat, and then came down to Sunset Hills to repose for awhile upon his laurels. Mrs. Malmaison gave a large party in honor of his return. All the gentry of the neighborhood were invited, and nearly all accepted the invitations, and they, together with the guests that were staying in the house, made quite a large company. Doctor Thogmorton's family, including Theodora, were invited. But Theodora, fearful that she would not be able to make a passable appearance with any dress that she possessed, was in serious doubts about going, until one morning Rose Garland came up into her attic, bearing on her arms a pretty evening dress

of silver gray barege, which she spread out upon the bed, saying,

"There, Theo! I have never worn it but once, because I don't like it, but it will just suit such a quiet little mouse as yourself; so if you can alter it to fit you, you may have it."

"Oh, thank you, Rose! I like it very much; but indeed, Rose, if you only would think so, it is the prettiest dress, you have, and the most becoming. You look like a moss rose in it, dear Rose."

"I don't like the moss—so be a moss rose-bud yourself, Dora," said the young lady, smiling as she went.

When the evening of the party came, the family of Mount Storm assembled in the parlor preparatory to setting out. Rose Garland was showily arrayed in a bright green silk, that rather set off her brilliant complexion and shining auburn hair. Mrs. Garland was imposing in a mazarine blue gros-de-nap. And the spiritual beauty of Theodora, in her shadowy drapery of silver gray, was lost amid such dazzling lights.

They entered the carriage and drove to Sunset Hills, and reached there—not too soon, as Mrs. Thogmorton saw by the flitting figures of the dancers passing the illuminated windows of the saloon.

They were met in the dressing-room by Vivia, who had remained there in waiting for her friend.

"Oh! how lovely you look, Vivia!" broke in admiration from the lips of Theodora as, after being embraced, she stood off to gaze upon her friend. Vivia was dressed in a rose-colored gauze, made so full, that as she moved it floated around her like a morning cloud. A crown of half blown blush roses sat above her white forehead and bright brown ringlets. "How beautiful you look, Vivia!"

"And so do you, my love."

"Me! why, look at me!"

"I do. Fortunatus's purse, with a French milliner to disburse its contents, could not have dressed you in better taste, except—you have nothing in your hair, my love?"

"No, why should I have? It is such a mockery to dress the head of a poor lame girl."

"That is morbid, and the beautiful head shall have its due," said Vivia, selecting a few moss buds from a vase of flowers on the dressing-table, and weaving them quickly and gracefully into a light and elegant wreath, which she twined around and among the soft brown tresses of Theodora. And then she drew her arm within her own, and followed the doctor, who, with Mrs. Thogmorton on one arm and Rose Garland on the other, led the way into the drawing-room.

It was very well filled, almost crowded. And they were obliged to move so slowly, that Theodora's limp escaped notice, until she attained the harbor of a seat in a remote part of the saloon, whence unobserved she could enjoy the sight of *other's* enjoyment. Vivia remained by her side until Mrs. Malmaison came up with some guest, whom she wished to distinguish, and presented "Mr. Conynghame, of Scotland," to "My niece, Miss Laglorieuse." This gentleman immediately invited Vivia, who could not refuse, to "honor" him with her hand for the quadrille, and led her off to the set that was just being formed.

Mrs. Malmaison, after a quiet greeting, and a few words with Theodora, glided away among her guests, and the little recluse was left alone to amuse herself with observing the company in the saloon. Besides the dancers, there were some few promenaders, who contrived, between the quadrille sets and the walls, to find space to make the circle of the room. These revolving stars interested Theodora very much, both as a study of individualities, and as a medium of the information that she had been too diffident to ask of any one. The one absorbing subject of interest and con-

versation, seemed to be the person in whose honor this party had been given. Austin's wealth, college honors, manly beauty, grace, accomplishments, etc., were canvassed again and again. Theodora learned from their discussion that Mr. Malmaison had arrived but that afternoon, and had not yet entered the saloon. But even while they resolved and talked, Theodora saw from her retreat, Austin enter. He was the same pensive, preoccupied looking man that she had first known him. He lingered for some time just within the door, letting his languid eyes rove leisurely over the heads of the company. Then he began to make his way slowly through the room, stopping frequently to exchange greetings with friends and acquaintances. Then Theodora for a while lost sight of him in the centre of the crowd. This set of quadrilles was over. Gentlemen were finding seats and ices for their late partners, and a temporary confusion prevailed, out of which Austin suddenly reappeared, now near to Theodora, but unconscious of her proximity. It amused the latter to observe the revolving promenaders, many of whom did not know the person of Austin, discussing the hero of the evening in his own presence, and it surprised her to observe how entirely absent-minded, unconscious, or indifferent the young gentleman appeared as he continued to retreat before the pressure of the crowd, and backing toward her own quarter of the room. Presently he turned abruptly, saw and recognized herself, with a sudden smile of joy.

"How do you do, Theodora, I am so very glad to see you," Austin said, taking the seat by her side, and reiterating his delight at the meeting, and pouring out a number of unconventional questions as how she had enjoyed life, occupied herself, and progressed in her painting since he had seen her last?

To all of which questions Theodora replied with diffident

frankness. At last, when quadrille sets were being formed again—

"Do you dance, Theodora?" he asked.

"No, Austin."

"You are not religiously opposed to that amusement, I am sure."

"Oh! no, but I *cannot dance.*"

"Oh! if that is all, you will soon acquire the art—you have such a fine ear for music that a little observation of other dancers would soon initiate you into the mysteries of Terpsichore. Come! there is Mr. Conynghame leading out Vivia, let us be their *vis-a-vis*, and you cannot go wrong."

"I thank you, Austin, I am sorry that I cannot dance with you, but I am lame."

"Tight shoes," thought Austin, but he said—"Not seriously, I trust, Theodora?"

"I had a fall on the ice some eighteen months ago. The doctor says that I am lamed for life; but do not look so sorry, Austin; I am quite used to it now, and it does not distress me the least."

"Dear Theodora, I will not believe that doctor's decision—you must go to the city with my mother, and have the advice of some eminent surgeon."

"Perhaps I might be permitted to do so; but, now do not tarry here with me, Austin; I am very well entertained in watching the dancers and promenaders. Go and join them. There is Helen Wildman, waiting for a partner."

"Who is that taking my name in vain?" exclaimed Helen, whose quick ear had caught the familiar sound of her own cognomen, as she advanced toward them. Helen wore a dress of clear white muslin without ornament; her rich black hair was arranged in plain bandeaux, and adorned with sprigs of the coral honeysuckle. Helen was in high beauty.

Austin immediately arose, as in duty bound, and proffered her his chair by the side of Theodora. Helen thanked him, and accepted it, declaring at the same time that she was heartily tired already of sitting still.

"Would you make one of our unworthy sex happy, by becoming his partner in the next quadrille?"

"Certainly," said Helen, smiling inwardly at what she supposed to be the success of her ruse, and rising to place her hand in that of Mr. Malmaison.

But with a deep bow and an "Au revoir," Austin turned, mingled with the crowd, and disappeared, leaving the young lady to reseat herself in the last degree of perplexity; but in a very few minutes Mr. Malmaison emerged from the crowd, and reappeared before them accompanied by Wakefield Brunton, whom he formally presented. Theodora gave Wakefield a bright and cordial welcome, and Helen, though in a rage, could do no otherwise now than bestow her hand, which he had come to solicit for the next set. As they walked off to secure the vacant stand opposite Vivia and Mr. Conynghame. Theodora lifted her soft eyes, full of approbation and inquiry, to the face of Austin, who with a smile of satisfaction resumed his lost seat at her side, and replying to her silent questioning, said—

"You are equally surprised and pleased to see Wakefield Brunton with us to-night. Well, dear Theodora, I will not have a secret from you. It was I who made *his* presence here a condition of my *own*. I know the social conservatism, so essentially opposed alike to Christianity and republicanism, that prevails among us—and I thoroughly scorn and detest it. Wakefield Brunton is poor in this world's goods, and of so called humble birth, as if, pardieu! any man with God for his father can be humbly born; as if in the glory of that Divine Parentage all lesser distinctions were not lost; all distinctions that is—that the Father does not in his own wisdom make by his gifts. Thus by

that Father's endowments, Wakefield is the equal of many, and the superior of most in this saloon. By his own inherent worth, he is entitled to the best respect we can give him. His character, education and gentlemanly manners, fit him for society. And I, for one, am determined that as far as my influence goes, moral and intellectual excellence shall, without regard to any other circumstances, receive their due."

Theodora replied silently, but eloquently, with that soft, bright smile, "like a light within a vase," that Austin ever found so inexpressibly charming.

"Vivia is of our opinion, dear Theodora. She danced her first quadrille, before you came in, with Wakefield Brunton. That was his passport to the favors of other young ladies."

"Vivia." began Theodora, in a voice that with excess of emotion faltered, and then broke down for a moment before she could go on; "Vivia seems to me like some Royal maiden whose smile bestows rank, and whose touch confers nobility on whomsoever it falls."

"It gives me so much pleasure, in my absence from you, to remember that you have Vivia, dear Theodora."

The time passed swiftly until the quadrilles were again brought to a pause, and the tired dancers were seeking seats.

"Oh! oh-h!" panted Helen, approaching them and leaning on Wakefield's arm, "I am wearied nearly to death!"

Austin knew what he was expected to do, and arose and resigned his seat to this troublesome and exacting beauty. Wakefield stood zealously fanning her.

"I am much obliged to you, Mr. Brunton, you needn't wait. Mr. Malmaison will be kind enough to—"

There are "none so deaf as those who do not choose to hear," and Austin perseveringly kept his face averted, and presently stooped down and whispered to his companion,

"You have been sitting so long, dear Theodora, that you must be very weary. Take my arm and come into the music room, it is empty."

"But my lameness, Austin?"

"Shall not attract the least attention; besides, why need you care if it does, poor bird?"

This was said with such infinite love and tenderness, that the proudest and most sensitive heart could not have felt in the words the least alloy of humiliating pity.

"You know that a crippled bird is apt to hide herself," said the young girl, smiling.

"Not from the companion whom her absence would grieve, dearest. Come! the music-room is very near, the door is just behind us. Come! let me lead you there, and then I will go and fetch Vivia, and we three will have some music among ourselves," said Austin, taking her hand.

Theodora's cheeks were beautifully flushed as she arose, took Austin's proffered arm, and submitted to be led into the music-room.

"I thought I hinted to you, Mr. Wakefield Brunton, that you need not wait!" exclaimed Helen, indignantly venting her disappointment upon her late partner's head, and snatching the fan from his hands.

But while she was fanning herself with furor, and before Wakefield had thought proper to obey her, Vivia came up, attended by a gentleman.

"Miss Wildman, permit me to present Mr. Conynghame."

Miss Wildman bent her bright little head in acknowledgment of Mr. Conynghame's deep bow.

"Miss Wildman, will you confer upon me the honor of your fair hand in the next quadrille," was the solicitation that presently followed this introduction.

"It is not a particularly *fair* hand, under the glove—in

fact it is rather brownish, but such as it is, you are welcome to it for the occasion specified," said Helen.

The foreigner stared, and took the first private opportunity to make a note of it.

"Wakefield," said Vivia, turning smilingly to the discarded partner, "will you be so kind as to give me your arm to the music-room."

A flush of joy arose to Wakefield's brow as he bowed most reverentially and obeyed.

"Ah! really, Miss Wildman! I ask for information, being a traveler for improvement—do people in the polite circles of this country, address their acquaintances by their Christian names?"

"When their names are Christian; yes!"

"And is there really nothing like etiquette?—I beg pardon, I ask for information."

"As I never saw the genuine article, I cannot inform you whether there is any good counterfeit of it or not. I believe people do pretty much as they please! A late President of the United States, the morning after his inauguration, went down to the city market, bought a cow and drove it home before him," said Helen, demurely.

"In-cred-i-ble!" exclaimed the amazed foreigner.

"Fact. You see he was an old farmer. His family did not feel flattered by his elevation to the Presidential chair, I assure you! His 'old woman' said she knew the fuss would 'kill Billy;' and it did, too!"

The foreigner was busy with his notes

"Excuse me—the facts you have imparted to me, are so *very* singular, and worthy of preservation. Pardon, again! you said that in this republican community, each man's pleasure was the rule of his actions?"

"Each *person*'s—man or woman's," said Helen, amendingly.

"Ah! but with no higher control; suppose their pleasures conflict?"

"Then, bowie knives and pistols," said Helen, solemnly.

While Helen was "doing" the foreigner, Vivia and Wakefield proceeded to the music-room.

"Do you propose to study any of the learned professions, Wakefield?" inquired the former.

"To acquire a knowledge of them—yes! to practice any one of them—no!"

"Why?"

"Because the alloy of falsehood and charlatanism mingling with each, would repel me at the very threshold of such a career. I have a strong appetite for study, and shall read all that I find worth reading upon law, physic, and divinity; and I have also the power of concentrating my mind upon one pursuit, and would doubtless win a fair share of success in the practice of either of those professions, but *pourquoi?* when I don't believe in either of them as professed and practiced now."

"You spoke of the *alloy* of error mingling with each one of these sciences, but only of alloy; would you therefore reject the whole precious ore?"

"Yes! unless I could refine it—a task in this case beyond my skill. But to leave the metaphor. Look at the law! a hopeless, inextricable entanglement, out of which cunning and not right, unless it is rich enough to buy cunning, finds its way. Physic! why it seems to me that the whole practice of medicine is essentially opposed to the laws of nature, and that if a present sickness is cured, it is at some fearful cost of future life and health. Divinity! it is what Christ taught the church run into mere external forms, and split up into ten thousand antagonistic sects; while, who has the spirit of Christ? Good heaven! when I think of the magnificent cathedrals, in their pomp of architecture, lifting their costly steeples toward heaven, and

overshadowing, in more senses than one, the ragged, hungry, ignorant, and all-suffering children at their base, I turn away from divinity, sicker at heart than from either of the human 'devices.' Dear Vivia, I would, sooner than enter into either of those 'learned professions,' go back to my work on the mountain and cultivate peas—for with them at least, I should find truth and self-respect."

"Then, have you formed no plans for the future?"

"None. Yet I do not wish to lead an easy, useless life, or a life useful only to very few. But for the present I see for myself no field of useful labor likely to be so productive of good, as that of taking care of my mother and little sisters, and educating the boys committed to my charge."

"Yet I wish you had some great, definite object that need not be inconsistent with your present duties. No matter, such an object will reveal itself in time. Let us go in."

They had paused at the door to exchange these few words, and now they entered the music-room. Vivia smiled brightly at seeing the serene, happy look of Theodora. Austin arose and offered chairs, and the four friends seated themselves, and were soon engaged in an animated conversation, which lasted until they heard all the company passing out toward the supper-room, which was in the furthest part of the building. Austin and Wakefield arose to attend their companions thither. But Vivia and Theodora both objected, saying that in the present rush after refreshments, they could not possibly get any thing except hard rubs, and that they preferred to remain where they were until the press was over, when Vivia would know where to find something that had not passed through the war of the supper-table. Then Austin said, that as the adjoining saloon was empty, and the quadrille band silent, an excellent opportunity was now afforded them to have some music. Vivia smilingly consented, sat down to the piano, and played and sang some of

her finest pieces, to the great delight of her little audience, who all loved music, not only with the ear, but with the soul. Then she arose, and said—

"I want you to hear Theodora sing her Spanish ballads, to her own accompaniment on the guitar."

Theodora, who never would have had the courage to play before a mixed company, hesitated only a moment, and then took the instrument and soon forgot herself, and made others forget her in melody. The silence that prevailed during, and for some moments after her songs were over, was the best comment upon their perfect beauty. Theodora felt that; she laid the instrument down, and her face beamed with the inner light of love, as she said—

"My teacher was Vivia."

But this congenial little circle could not long remain undisturbed. At the solicitation of Austin, Vivia went to the harp and commenced playing the prelude to his favorite song, when several ladies and gentlemen who had wandered from the supper-table back to the saloon, attracted by the first sound of Vivia's voice, now made their appearance at the door of the music-room. However disconcerted the little party might really feel by this unexpected addition to their number, there was nothing to do but receive and entertain the intruders. Austin bowed and wheeled forward a sofa for the ladies. Vivia looked up, acknowledged their presence with a smile and bend of the head, and continued her song. And very soon others were added to her audience. The guests were now pouring back from the supper room into the saloon. Replete with the good things of the table, and indisposed to immediate exercise in promenading or dancing, they were just in the mood to become the passive recipients of amusement. Drawn by the notes of the harp and the delicious voice of the singer, they now crowded to the music-room, filling it to suffocation.

In a short pause of her singing, Vivia turned to Austin and whispered,

"Theodora cannot bear this close air, she is already drooping, take her out through the conservatory into the garden. I will join you there as soon as I can get free."

Austin stooped and proposed this plan to Theodora, who immediately arose, gave him her hand, and permitted him to take her away. The attention of the company was fortunately concentrated upon Vivia, and so the shy girl was enabled to escape without drawing curious observation to her misfortune. They passed out of the music-room into the conservatory, and down through a walk, bordered each side with terrace above terrace, filled with the rarest and most beautiful exotics, yet scarcely paused to admire them; for their rich aroma, delicious as it was, was too oppressive for the delicate girl, already half-fainting for pure fresh air. Through the opposite end of the conservatory they emerged into the garden.

"'Will you walk or sit?" inquired Austin, leading her toward an arbor.

"I prefer to walk awhile. Nay," she added, looking up and smiling, and then quickly dropping her eyes, while a rosy flush suffused her cheek—"you must not look so distressed, Austin. Motion is not painful to me. It is only unpleasant to feel the eyes of strangers following me when I try to walk, that is all."

"Since motion does not give you pain then, dear Theodora, mind nothing else connected with this calamity. Only believe that your friends love you better than ever for the beautiful patience it has developed in your soul. And for myself, dear Theodora, believe that it is my heart's dearest hope to be able to shield you from every possible uneasiness."

"Basil! Basil! I have been looking for you everywhere! Oh! is it you, Mr. Malmaison? I beg your pardon! I

thought when I saw you walking so confidentially with Dora that it was my brother," said Helen Wildman, suddenly breaking upon them.—"Where is he, Dora? Do tell me! It is time for me to go home!"

"I am sure I do not know, Helen. I have not seen your brother this whole evening."

"Indeed! why? how is that? have you had a quarrel?" asked Helen, in a dozen exclamations, and with a look of unbounded astonishment—that, taken with her previous words and her whole manner, very much perplexed and troubled Austin.

"No, we have not quarreled, of course. What makes you talk so, Helen?" answered Theodora in amazement.

"Fickle, then! or capricious! Well! Mr. Malmaison, *will* you be so kind as to go and look up my brother; I will stay here and take care of Dora until you come," said Helen. Austen bowed, and went to do her bidding.

In the mean time Vivia, having finished her third song, resigned her place at the harp to Mrs. Malmaison, and came out to join her friends. She came up just as Austin had left. Her presence was a check upon Helen's eccentricities, and therefore a signal blessing to Theodora. Austin soon returned, accompanied by Blaise, who seemed in a very miserable mood, as he took Helen's arm within his own, bowed, and stalked away. When they were gone, Austin, with hesitation and reluctance, informed Theodora that Dr. Thogmorton's carriage was waiting, and that Mrs. Thogmorton had dispatched him to look for her niece. Theodora signified her wish to join her party, and they turned to to re-enter the house.

"We need not traverse the whole suite of 'festive' apartments," said Vivia, laughing, "we can go along the back verandah, and enter the cloak-room at once."

"Will you be rested sufficiently to drive out with Vivia

and myself to-morrow afternoon, dear Theodora?" asked Austin, in taking leave at the door of the dressing-room.

"Of course she will," answered Vivia, as they bade him adieu and entered.

CHAPTER XXII.

ADVERSE POWERS.

Whom first we love, you know, we seldom wed;
Time rules us all. And life indeed is not
The thing we planned it out, ere hope was dead;
And then we women cannot choose our lot.

Much must be borne which it is hard to bear,
Much given away which it were sweet to keep.
God help us all, who need indeed his care,
And yet I know the Shepherd loves his sheep.—*Unknown.*

THE next afternoon, the next after that, and many succeeding days of the pleasant summer weather, Austin came, accompanied by Vivia, to take Theodora out to ride in the little pony carriage. Rose Garland exclaimed, "What a whim!" Mrs. Thogmorton declared "They are spoiling that girl;" while the doctor had too heavy care upon his own mind to heed trifles, and Basil Wildman, on his part, seethed and fretted in silence, and Helen—bided her time.

Another, not the least interested in these affairs, Mrs. Malmaison, looked on quietly, never encouraging, never deterring her son or niece in any of their movements. When they brought Theodora to Sunset Hills, she welcomed her in an even, silvery tone of voice, which possessed as much music as could possibly exist separate from emotion.

But earlier than usual in the autumn she made preparations to return to Baltimore, and by the first of October her mansion was again closed for the winter.

The parting between Austin, Vivia and Theodora was

cheerful, full of hope and promise. Austin was confident that his mother would come down with a large party, and keep Christmas in the country house, and that but little more than two months would pass before they should all meet again. And so with mutual kind wishes and gay hopes they separated—alas! when and how to gather again? The departure of Austin and of Vivia was the closing of a bright epoch in the life of Theodora. It is true that their absence was intended to last but a very short time, and that frequent letters lightened the heavy days, still many circumstances combined to darken and oppress the season.

Anxious care, that had long brooded over the countenance of the doctor, now clouded the faces of all the members of the family. There was a scarcity of money, a difficulty in getting credit, and frequent trouble from duns whom it was impossible to satisfy. Jane and Mary, the younger daughters, had reached an age when it became proper to remove them from school; but they were still permitted to remain there—the reason of their non-removal unspoken but evident—the payment of their board and tuition bills had been put off from term to term, and they were now understood to be deferred for final settlement until the removal of the pupils. And as the family were not in funds to meet the payments, the two young ladies were left a sort of honorable hostage, with which, by the way, the gentle sisterhood would have made no difficulty in parting.

Affairs were in this uncomfortable condition until about the middle of November, when Theodora received a letter from Austin, telling her that his mother had suddenly decided to go to Paris with all her family for the winter; that he was more disappointed than he could express, in not being able to come down and spend Christmas near her; that nothing but the suddenness of Mrs. Malmaison' movements would have prevented him from running down to take

leave of her in person, instead of writing that letter which, he said, was written on the eve of their voyage. He finished by assuring her of his devoted affection, and expressing an earnest hope that they should meet early in the spring. Theodora wept long over this letter before she could see to read that of Vivia, which accompanied it. Vivia's epistle was as affectionate and cheerful as herself. She expressed her great regret at their mutual disappointment and separation, but bade Theodora "stand fast in the faith" that they would have a joyful meeting the next spring. And in the mean time she charged her with a commission—not to let Wakefield grow discontented and depressed in her absence.

And, by the way, in writing her adieu to Wakefield, Vivia had also said very much the same thing in effect—namely, that he must not leave Theodora to fade and droop in the confinement of her home, but must frequently go and draw her out for a quiet walk or ride. Thus giving her friends in charge of each other, she sought to provide in her absence for their welfare. Doctor Thogmorton also received letters from Mrs. Malmaison, speaking of her impending voyage, and the uncertain length of her absence, and giving instructions as to the conducting of her two estates of Mount Storm and Sunset Hills. If this mail brought sorrow to Theodora, it certainly seemed to bring nothing but gladness to the other members of the family.

Doctor Thogmorton moved as if a great weight had been lifted from his mind, and he looked like a criminal reprieved from immediate death and enjoying a reasonable hope of a final exemption from execution. But not until the arrival, three days later, of the next mail, with the New York papers containing the news of the sailing of the steamer, with the list of her passengers, among whom were the names of "Mrs. Malmaison, Mr. Malmaison, Miss Laglorieuse, and two servants," did he look as if he felt a full pardon had arrived. And now the doctor stepped about, a free, active,

busy, hopeful man. And his new cheerfulness was reflected in the faces of all his family.

It was in something less than a month from the departure of the Malmaisons, that the doctor announced to his family his intention of selling out his property in Maryland, and emigrating to Texas. Great as was the astonishment—I had nearly said the shock—of this intelligence, it was, when when once fairly understood, entirely approved. Mrs. Thogmorton, worn out with long efforts to preserve a factitious gentility, was not unwilling to go to some new place where there was no necessity for "keeping up appearances." And Rose Garland, and also her young sisters, when they came to hear of the plan, were all agog for the novelty of a long journey, and a change of country.

But Theodora? Every one seemed to forget her, even when commencing the preliminary measures for their breaking up and removal. Theodora did not even know whether she was expected to accompany them, or any arrangement was to be made for her remaining behind. And she was much too diffident to intrude her personal interests upon the notice of the busy and excited family. The doctor succeeded in disposing of a portion of his property on very advantageous terms. Their most troublesome creditors were satisfied, and the young ladies school bills paid.

Jane and Mary came out from the Convent like birds from a cage, all eager for a further flight, and lent their aid most zealously to hasten preparations for departure. These girls, respectively seventeen and nineteen years of age, would have been known anywhere in that neighborhood, from their strong family likeness, as the sisters of Rose Garland. They had her embonpoint, her clear red and white complexion, her bright yellow hair, and her merry blue eyes, and looked scarcely younger than their blooming sister. Their fresh young spirits put quicksilver into the jaded limbs of the wearied family, so rapidly from the moment of

their arrival did the work of pulling down and packing up go on. The time fixed for leaving Mount Storm was the first of the ensuing January. It was now the middle of December, but two weeks remained, and no word had been spoken to Theodora relative to her destiny.

Basil Wildman continued to be a frequent visitor at Mount Storm. But he remained as awkward, timid and tongue-tied as ever; contented to sit silent a whole evening in the parlor, if Theodora were only in his sight, but anxious and restless if she were invisible, and off and away the moment after he had ascertained there was no hope of her appearance.

Helen remonstrated with him upon the subject of his self-doubt and hesitation.

"Only two weeks left till they all leave Mount Storm, and you have not proposed to Theodora yet!"

"Well, I can't help it. There has been no opportunity. There has always been a room full of people when I have gone there to see her."

"And there always will be, of course; you must make an opportunity. Go and ask to see *her*, and I warrant an uninterrupted interview."

"Oh! I couldn't! never! it would scare her, the little, shrinking creature!"

"Not a bit of it! besides, supposing it did? She would get over it, I reckon."

"And then I shouldn't know what to say to her no more than a—than a—"

"Than a Basil Wildman! you can't go beyond *that* for an illustration of stupidity. Why don't you read? But what's the use of talking! You never would study to improve your mind. A fine cultivated companion Theodora will have in you!"

"Now don't, Helen! don't! you know I never had time to study," replied poor Blaise, in perfect good faith.

"No, but you have had time enough to go up to Eyrie, and play cards, and lose money. A fine provider Theodora will find in you."

"Oh! don't Helen, don't! I never will touch another card after I get her."

"But you will *never* get her, if you don't ask her."

"I would if I could get the chance—"

"*Make* a chance!"

"And knew what to say—"

"I'll tell you—I'll give you a programme of putting the question from my own experience."

Helen did so, and "beat the words into his head until he had learned them by heart," as she afterward expressed it. "And now," concluded Helen, "that you have your speech at your tongue's end, you must so time your visit to Mount Storm that you reach there just *after* daylight, and yet *before* candlelight. Then ask to see Theodora. They will understand, and invite you into a vacant parlor, and which in twilight is so dusky that you cannot see to blush. When Theodora comes in, rise and meet her, hand her a chair, take one by her side, and with what preliminaries the time suggests, deliver your speech. Your alternative is to do that or lose her."

"I'll do it," said Blaise.

CHAPTER XXIV

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST.

Metamorphosed with a mistress.—*Shakspeare.*

According to this programme the play proceeded up to a certain point, and then—but we anticipate. The next

day, a little after sunset, Basil Wildman presented himself at the front door of Mount Storm. Basil was in his best looks, if that could be said to be best which had never been good. But Helen had superintended his toilet. She had brushed his coat, varnished his boots, tied his cravat, combed and waxed his stiff red hair, which she declared to be as sharp and prickly as flax-hackles; and finally had smoothed his hat and set it on his head, given him his neatly cleaned and mended gloves, and turning him round about, concluded he might "do," and dismissed him.

And now Blaise stood knocking at the hall door of Mount Storm. He was admitted by old Pharaoh, who invited him into the drawing-room, and said that he would call the ladies.

"No," faltered Blaise, "only Miss Theodora."

And while Pharaoh was gone to do his bidding, Blaise waited, thinking the minutes hours, and wondering at the unusual length of the twilight. And yet at last, Theodora entered too soon for his composure. And he must have lost his self-possession in all manner of nervousness, but that when his eyes fell on the figure of his little lady-love, her delicate, spiritual beauty, and fluttering, crippled movement toward him, made him utterly forget himself, and think only of her; drew out his whole heart toward her in the tenderest compassion, with the yearning desire to shield and defend her from all possible harm, to surround her with such care and comfort as only such deep and pure affection as that which burned within his own heart for her could supply. And as he went to meet her, this warm, pure, unselfish love, gave something of grace to the awkward, ungainly form, and somewhat of melody to the coarse, rough voice, and some degree of free utterance to the hesitating mind. And when he led her to a seat, he stood half embracing the chair on which she rested, and asked when Dr. Thogmorton thought of leaving.

She answered, "On Wednesday week."

"And—are you going with them, Dora?"

"I do not know. Nothing has been said about it."

"Oh! do not think of going, Dora. You never could bear either the long journey to Texas, or the rough life in that wild country. I came here this evening on purpose to beseech you not to think of going."

"Why, Basil—"

But he had sunk down by her side, as if, however, without the least diminution of tender reverence, to draw nearer to her; and half kneeling and half embracing the chair that held her, with the natural eloquence that deep, strong, earnest, fervent feeling lends the most untutored nature, he poured forth the history of his love. He told her that before he had known her, he had never *loved*, and scarcely indeed had *lived;* that his life had been a mere round of work, food, and sleep; and not much higher than that of the oxen that plowed his fields. But that *she* had awakened his heart and his brain, and quickened a host of beautiful thoughts and affections, that all turned to her as their inspirer and their object.

The instructions of Helen were quite forgotten, all art was forgotten, pure affection only was remembered, truth and nature only expressed. Theodora heard him in silence and in deep emotion, for every glowing word he breathed revealed also the hidden yearning of her own soul toward another. It was true that for that other she could never be any thing dearer than the little friend and protege; yet, at least, she must never hold a nearer relation than that to any one. But from the depths of her gentle heart, she compassionated the disinterested lover, whom she must soon dismiss to leave her presence, taking disappointment with him. And yet how should she speak the words that must give such great pain to one who perhaps loved her more than did any other in the whole world.

She could find no language gentle and grateful and soothing enough in which to couch her rejection. She dropped her head upon her bosom, and covered her face with her hands. But that did not prevent the tears revealing themselves by stealing through her fingers. Basil felt encouraged by her gentle emotion, and essayed to remove her hands. But immediately and voluntarily dropping them, she said,

"Dear Basil, I always loved you like a dear brother, and always shall. Please try to forget that you ever thought of me in any other light, and *I* shall forget what you have said."

There was a pause, interrupted at length by Basil, who, in a choking voice, faltered,

"Do you mean, Theodora, that I have no hope—no hope of—of—"

"Yes, dear Basil, that is what I mean. I shall never change my—name, Basil, as it is not right indeed that I ever should."

"Why? Dearest Dora, why?"

Theodora raised her eyes in one expressive, mournful glance, that said more eloquently than words could have spoken,

"Out of my studio I am quite helpless," and dropped them again.

Basil understood, and hastened to assure her earnestly, fervently, that her helplessness did but bind him closer to her service, that all he wished to live for was to promote her comfort and happiness, and he was going on in the same strain, when Theodora gently raised her hand and stopped him.

"Don't, dear Basil. You cannot immolate your life upon that of a poor invalid like me. No, be silent! I only weep because I must say no; but though it is said, painfully, falteringly, believe me it is a decision irrevocable as if it were

sternly sworn. Let us forget what has been said, and be brother and sister as before."

"Good-by! God bless you, Theodora! As to our being brother and sister as before—I shall never see your sweet face again. And—and he who cannot love you better may have better success—but—in any event—God forever bless you!"

And Basil pressed her hand and was gone—out before the candles were in, and galloping home through the short winter twilight.

"Rejected! rejected!" he exclaimed to Helen, who met him at the horse block.

"Rejected! Come in and tell me all about it, and don't look so woe-begone! I'll warrant it is nothing of a rejection after all."

Basil tied his horse, leaving him for a groom to take away, and followed Helen into the parlor that was just now empty of living furniture. He threw himself despairingly upon a wooden settee, and in a broken, disjointed style, related what had passed at the interview.

"Pooh! don't you see she is not more than half in earnest? Try again," said Helen.

"No, I have bid her good-by, forever. I would not trouble her again for the world. It would be rude to repeat my proposal after what she said," moaned Basil.

"Nonsense! you needn't trouble *her* again. Go to her aunt."

"Helen! if you think I would do any thing that is not upright and straightforward to get Dora, you are very much mistaken. If the little, delicate creature can't like such a great brute as I am, she *can't*, and it is no wonder, that is all. I'd cut my tongue out before it should speak a word to her guardians, to give her annoyance."

"How little you know of girls," said Miss Helen, competently, "or you would know how much they sometimes

like being coaxed and persuaded into doing just what they are inclined to do. Only get Mrs. Thogmorton to *plead your cause* with Theodora."

"I'll do nothing of the sort. Well do I know, should Mrs. Thogmorton favor my cause, what style of *pleading* she would use with her dependent niece. No! I would not set her on my poor, dear little wounded bird—if it were to save my soul from death!" and getting up, as if sick of the interview, Basil left the room.

Helen paused in deep thought—"What spell," she cogitated, "has that little, pale transparency over the hearts of men? How has she charmed Austin, high-born, wealthy, proud, and fastidious as he is? How has she fascinated his opposite, my poor, ignorant, boorish cousin, and so metamorphosed him that he is beginning to think and feel —to have delicate scruples and aspiring ideas!—actually, by slow degrees coming on, I should not wonder—to be a gentleman!—perhaps—who knows? a scholar! Well! Austin must be given up, and Basil must be accepted! But it is *I* who shall have to accomplish it all, and in less than two weeks, too! And to do it, I must see Mrs. Thogmorton, to-morrow."

CHAPTER XXV.

CONSPIRACIES.

> With a little hoard of maxims,
> Preaching down a daughter's heart.—*Tennyson.*

ACCORDINGLY, the next morning, Helen Wildman went over to Mount Storm, and asked to see Mrs. Thogmorton, alone. That lady was deep in the business of packing up, and with some surprise and impatience at the interruption,

and perplexed conjecture as to its cause, left her work and went into the parlor to receive her visitor.

Helen had come upon an errand that would have confused almost any other agent than herself. But bashfulness was not her besetting weakness.

Smiling archly, she arose and came forward to meet and shake hands with her hostess. When that ceremony was over—

"Mrs. Thogmorton, I have come courting," she said.

"Courting—Miss Helen!"

"Yes, ma'am! a curious errand for a young lady, this not being leap-year."

"You are—incomprehensible, Miss Helen."

"And *you*—are excessively busy! I understand that, Mrs. Thogmorton, and will take up as little of your precious time as possible; and I will, if we come to an understanding, stay and help you the remainder of the day."

"No, I did not mean that, Helen—but what is it *you* mean?"

"Why, that I have come to *court* you for your influence with Theodora, on behalf of my poor, love-sick, broken-hearted Blaise," said Helen, laughing.

"Well! what can I do? How far has this matter proceeded?"

"To the awful ultimatum of a rejection. He proposed yesterday—was refused—and now only defers committing suicide until he can decide as to the best manner of making away with himself," said Helen, still laughing.

"Really! and is he so seriously disappointed?"

"To the verge of madness."

"Pooh! I never can make you out, Helen. Is this really so, or are you jesting?"

"I am solemnly in earnest," said Helen, gravely.

"Absurd! but it serves Basil rightly. He should have

spoken to *me* first. Go home, Helen, and send him back to me—I can promise him a better answer."

"Ay! but hear me a moment, Mrs. Thogmorton. My honest cousin is afflicted with crotchets. One of his crotchets is a strong objection to have Theodora *influenced* in his favor; his idea is that her response to his affection must be entirely voluntary, nay, spontaneous as his own feeling. So, you see, if you and I are to put our heads together to make these lovers happy in spite of their whims, we must use management. I do not deny that I am very anxious to have Basil marry Theodora. I think marriage would be the making of him."

"I understand you, Helen. I must say that I honor the delicate scruples of Basil, needless as I think them. And I approve your sisterly affection and solicitude, Helen. So few people would give the gipsy Helen credit for so much love and wisdom."

Helen fidgetted uneasily, made a mocking and *self*-mocking grimace, and then said—"It is so purely disinterested on my part also."

"I am sure of it. Now in this affair *I* know what to do. You are only, when you return home, to persuade Basil of what is the truth, namely, that his rejection yesterday evening meant nothing at all. Feed his hopes. I will be at work in the mean time with Theodora—and when all is ready, I will send and let you know. But—we are liable to interruption here; come up into my room, where we can talk over this matter without the fear of intrusion."

And thither the two conspirators repaired to elaborate their plans. An hour passed, and Helen came out and returned home.

In the mean time the unconscious object of these machinations stood before her easel, painting; as usual so absorbed that she took no heed of an ascending step and an opening

door, and another presence in the attic, until a soft hand was laid upon her shoulder, as a soft voice said,

"My dear!"

And Theodora started and turned to see her aunt, a most unusual visitor.

"How flushed your cheek is, my love! and how brilliant your eye! This painting is a consuming fever that is burning out your life. You must stop it. Come away to the fire. I want to talk to you."

And half leading and half embracing the fragile creature, Mrs. Thogmorton conducted her to the little old sofa that now sat near the wood fire. When they were seated, Mrs. Thogmorton, modulating her voice to the sweetest tones of love—said—

"My dear little Dora, we have scarcely ever understood each other rightly—and I fear you have often thought me unloving when I was only care-laden. My only sister's only child, I have *seemed* indifferent—but I never knew how much I really loved you, until now: now that we are so soon to part."

"To part, aunt?"

"Yes, my love! Did you not think I knew it all? Ah! dear child! why should you have hidden your heart from me? from me, who stand in the place of a mother to you? Your dead mother's only sister?"

"Aunt Maria, I do not know what you are talking about?" said Theodora, in perplexity and vague foreboding.

"Ah, my little love! don't know what I am talking about? Why, what a sly puss it *is!* or is it only a *shy* one?" replied the lady, with a dash of archness over her tears, like a sunbeam on the raindrops.

"Indeed, indeed, I don't, Aunt Maria!"

"Hush sh-sh!" said the lady, drawing her down to her bosom, and closing her lips with a kiss. "Hush sh-sh! It is quite time now that there should be no concealment,

for any cause whatever, between us. Do you suppose that I have been blind to the object of Basil Wildman's visits to this house for the last three years?"

"Aunt Thogmorton—"

"Hush, dear, it is all right; I do not blame you the least in the world. It was wrong, perhaps, to conceal the state of affairs from me so long; up, I may say, to the last possible hour; it was unconfiding and unkind on the part of my dead sister's child, who is in all but the name like a child of my own. But I will not reproach you, love; it was natural, perhaps; it was your constitutioual shyness, probably; or possibly it might only have been that you knew the marriage could not be a very acceptable one to me; nor is it, indeed; but I forgive you, my dear, dear Dora, and I wish you every possible happiness!" whispered the lady, in a low, gentle voice, pressing the little form closer to her bosom.

Theodora was so amazed, so alarmed, that her self-possession was nearly or quite lost.

"But, aunt," she faltered, "indeed, Aunt Thogmorton—"

"Nonsense, love! don't be bashful with your old aunt! Besides, it is time now for me to have your full confidence, that I may begin preparations for the wedding, you know," murmured the lady.

"I am not going to be married!" exclaimed Theodora.

"Pooh, pooh! my love, it is too late for these little girlish prevarications now! We have but ten days left, and the wedding must be over before we leave. It is best, too. I do not believe in long engagements!"

"But I am not engaged!" said Theodora, in alarm.

"Nonsense, my love! Every one knows that you *are!*"

"Before Heaven, I am not engaged!"

"Theodora, what do you tell me?" exclaimed her aunt, in a tone of well-feigned astonishment.

"The truth, nothing but the truth!"

"And you are not betrothed to Basil Wildman?"

"No, in the sight of the Lord, no!"

"Then you *ought* to be!" exclaimed the lady.

"No, dear aunt, no! I ought *not* to be! I am not helpful enough to be a wife."

Mrs. Thogmorton withdrew her arms from around the form of her niece, put her away, and for some moments remained silent; when she spoke, it was in cold terms.

"And what am I to understand, then, by that which I have seen pass under my own eyes for these many months?"

"Aunt Thogmorton, if you will please to credit me, I do not know what you have been talking to me about, or rather the *grounds* for what you have said. I feel confused, as one who has been aroused out of sleep, and with dreams still clinging around her, is not fully awake, or able to comprehend surrounding circumstances."

"In two words, I speak of the long and frequent visits of Basil Wildman to this house."

"Aunt! why *other* gentlemen have been in the constant habit of visiting the house for a much longer period, and much more frequently than Basil!" said Theodora, in distress.

This answer baffled and silenced the lady for a while; but soon she recovered herself, and answered, in a gentler voice, however,

"That is very ingenious, Theodora; but it does not explain the affair. We have all known the footing upon which *other* gentlemen have come here; as friends of the family. We have also known the footing upon which Basil Wildman came, as a suitor to yourself. Deny it, if you can."

Theodora could not deny it, but she said:

"I could not help his coming."

"That is an evasion, my dear. You *could* have helped his coming. You *should* have helped his coming. You should have given him to understand that his visits were unacceptable."

"How could I do that, dearest aunt, when I did not know until yesterday that his visits were intended for me?"

"Now, Theodora, how could you, the most interested person, be blind to that affection which every one else saw?"

"I do not know, indeed! but ah, I was blind!"

"Theodora, come, let us talk calmly and dispassionately about this affair."

Theodora looked up.

"Here has been this young man visiting you, paying all sorts of attentions to you, hoping and expecting success to his visits, for three years, unrebuked. It is true that I, myself, did not quite approve of him as your suitor. I thought as my niece, you had a right to be more aspiring; but as there was nothing seriously objectionable in the young fellow, as you yourself had no dower, I would not interfere with your free choice, and so he has continued to frequent the house in the character of your accepted lover for years past, it being generally understood that as soon as you should be of proper age the marriage would take place. You are not yet quite marriageable at seventeen, but the event is necessarily hastened by our impending departure. So, my dear Theodora, if you have any regard for our convenience, pray leave vacillating, caprice, and coquetry; all very charming, no doubt, when there is time to indulge in the amusement, but under present circumstances very awkward and embarrassing;—and let us have a merry wedding before we go," said the lady, smiling and caressing her.

"Aunt—my dear aunt, indeed you are entirely mistaken. I am not engaged. I have never given the slightest encouragement to Basil. And I mean never to marry, least of all him."

"Then, Theodora, permit me to ask you *what* you intend to do? Here have we been confidently expecting that you would be married before our departure, and that we should leave you provided for. And now, at the last hour, almost,

you tell me that you will not be married! Now what do you expect to do?"

"Oh! indeed, I do not know! the question is so sudden! I did not know what you intended, I thought, perhaps, that you would take me with you to Texas."

"Take you with us to Texas! Have you any idea of the additional expense that would be, child? Theodora! you know that I have now—*nothing*—more the shame and pity! And you have no claim upon Doctor Thogmorton, who habitually complains of the size of the family, and feels abused because my own daughters remain so long on our hands. The doctor could not be persuaded to take you to Texas, Theodora. And even if he could, would it be pleasant to you to go, knowing that his protection was unwillingly given?"

"No! oh! no! But is there not something that I could do for a living? Vivia says I have a future fortune in my art."

"Poor child!" said the lady, looking at her half in pity, half in compunction—"a great fortune has your art been to you!"

"Oh! I know, here in the country; but here people do not buy pictures, except portraits, and do not appreciate even them. But in the city, aunt! If you would take me to the city on your way south, and introduce me to some of your acquaintances, so that I may have protection, and get me board with some respectable private family and leave me there? I am sure if I did not make a fortune, I should make a good living by painting, and soon be able to assist Mary and Jane, and ease somewhat the burden of the large family. I am sure that in the city I should be at least able to do this. Perhaps I might even make a fortune; but I am not sanguine, and do not expect so much," pleaded Theodora.

"What a chimera! A young girl proposes to go to the

city and set up a studio! Why, I am really word*less*, breathless, with amazement! It would be improper, indelicate, *indecent.*"

"But why, aunt? Why? It is surely not sinful. It is surely better than to marry only for a living and a home."

"Theodora, you absolutely shock me! Never let me hear you name such a thing again to me while we remain together! No, my dear, the only good and wise thing left for you to do is to wed Basil Wildman. You owe it to him. You have encouraged him whether you are inclined to acknowledge it or not. You have given him hopes which it were dishonest to disappoint."

"Oh! what shall I do? Oh, Vivia, if you were only here! Oh! Aunt Thogmorton, I cannot! I cannot! Only let me go away! I do not care where! I will never trouble you or the doctor in the world if you will only let me go away and do for myself!"

"Yes! you would soon indeed do for yourself, poor child! Poor, helpless child! what would you try to do?"

"What I said! What I said!" exclaimed Theodora, clasping her hands beseechingly. "Oh, let me go!"

"Nonsense, child! I bade you not name such a wild chimera to me again."

Theodora's hands were now unclasped and pressed against her bosom.

"What is your objection to Basil?" said Mrs. Thogmorton, possessing herself of one of her niece's hands, and looking steadily in her pale face. "What is your objection to Basil?"

"Nothing, nothing that I should not also have against any other."

"—Except—?" said Mrs. Thogmorton, peering into her face.

Theodora had stopped suddenly, and her cheeks were suffused with blushes.

"Except—?" again queried the lady, gazing deeply into the blushing face. "Except—Austin Malmaison!" finally concluded Mrs. Thogmorton. The pulse under her finger gave a great bound, thrilled like a rudely touched harp-string, and seemed as if about to stop. The cheeks that had flushed to a brighter crimson now faded into pallor. The face was averted, the eyes fixed upon the ground. Mrs. Thogmorton watched her in silence a few seconds, and then said,

"I have your secret, Theodora. I love you better for knowing it. It shall be safe with me! But let me give you a little piece of good common sense advice. Poor child! the attentions of that young gentleman have quite turned your head!" added the lady, seeing the increasing distress of her niece. "You must forget them, Theodora. Those attentions, marked as they undoubtedly were, meant nothing—or nothing more than compassion for a sick and suffering girl. Say, did you dream that they meant more than this? Answer me."

"Oh, aunt!"

"Well, now, did you?"

"No, madam!"

"I am very glad that you did not; for, Theodora, summon your reason! look at things by its clear light. Here is Austin, with every advantage of family, wealth, position, personal graces and accomplishments, an extensive intercourse with the best society in this country, and now also in Europe, a match for the richest heiress or the greatest belle, and—here are you, a poor little lame girl, quite penniless, and nearly destitute—think of it!"

"I do, I do! Oh, madam, spare me! I never harbored such vain thoughts—never!"

"Austin never could have looked upon you with other feelings than pity, and never considered you in any other

light than that of a poor unfortunate girl whom benevolence moved him to comfort and assist."

"Oh, I know it! I know it! Why do you urge this so persistently?"

"Not to distress you, but to corroborate your own convictions, that a union with Austin is utterly beyond the remotest possibility."

"I never dreamed of such a thing! For heaven's love, say no more!"

"And yet, with your whole heart and soul and strength you love Austin!"

A deep, tearless sob seemed to rend her bosom, and her head dropped upon her open hands.

"The human heart is the most willful, weak thing that I know of in the Lord's creation! It is not to wring yours but to strengthen it, that I now speak. This fantastical young love, Theodora, is nothing more than a transient epidemic of the bosom, by no means dangerous, to which young people between fifteen and twenty-five are peculiarly liable. It passes off in a short time, especially if the lovers marry. As a general thing, I firmly believe that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, no greater misfortune could happen to one than a union with the first love. Marriages of convenience are universally abused; yet, as firmly do I believe that the balance of happiness is in their favor. I judge from personal experience and from observation of society. Theodora, my first marriage was one of convenience, with a widower of thrice my own age—I being sixteen, Mr. Garland forty-eight. My life with him was the happiest portion of my earthly career; it was very blessed, had I been wise enough to know it at the time. He died, and after a few years of widowhood, I wedded a second time, and from motives of such pure affection, that I reserved not one dollar of the fortune Mr. Garland had left me, but endowed Dr. Thogmorton with the whole. Theodora, you

have been with me all your life, and you saw me in both positions; with whom was I happier, with the man of my parents' choosing, or with the one of my own willful choice?"

"Oh, aunt, it is too late now, too sad now, to ask that question!"

"But it is not too late for you to profit by my experience. It is not with the one she *loves*, but with the one by whom she is *loved*, that a woman finds peace."

"But may not the loved and the loving be one?"

"I do not know. I have never proved it, either by experience or observation. I doubt it. But now, my dear, take your own affairs into consideration. You must make up your mind to marry Basil. He loves you, and he deserves you. For though, as I said before, he is scarcely the equal of *my* niece, yet under all the circumstances, he is as fair a party as you could hope to find. Basil is of a good old family, his circumstances are now comfortable. In character, he is upright, honorable, benevolent, and, last and greatest, he is disinterestedly and devotedly attached to *you*. He loved you before your misfortune, and his affection has continued unabated since. His constancy should have won a better return than fickleness and final rejection. And it must still be rewarded, for however you may have answered his offer of yesterday, after having suffered, and thereby encouraged his visits for three years, you cannot in honor withdraw. You must marry him, my love. Nay, hush! say no more, my dear child! You really must, having gone so far. There is no other way. Don't despair! take heart, my child! You *must* be happy with Basil, he is such a good fellow, and so devoted to you. I must go now. Good-by for the present."

And so saying, the lady stooped and kissed Theodora and passed out of the room.

Unable to answer, Theodora sat half-stupefied with sor-

row. Slowly she let herself sink upon the floor, and turning her face downward, burying it under her arms and her cloud of hair, moaned,

"Oh, misery! misery! misery!"

Long she lay there in the *abandon* of grief. After a while, slowly she arose, cleared the disheveled tresses from her face, looked around, went and secured her door, and then walked to the large chest under the window, from its depths took out a portrait, carried and set it upon her easel, and fixed her eyes upon it with a burning gaze, spoke to it, her whole soul's emotion trilling in the low tones of her voice.

"Yes—I knew indeed, that from your own higher and happier life, you looked down only in compassion upon the poor sphere of mine. I knew that was all. Yet still it were sweet to be free to dedicate this little life with all it has of any worth, to you—to be free to think only of you all day, dream only of you all night, live with you in the spirit all my earthly life—looking forward to the time when in Heaven the soul, casting off its disguise of flesh, shall appear in its own immortal beauty, when you should see me and know me for your own eternally, when I should rejoice to say, 'I have been faithful unto death!' This should have been my earthly lot. Thus in a happy vision I should have lived with you in spirit, my love! my love! Should have merged my life in a blessed dream of yours, until the night of earth should have been past, and the day of Heaven at hand. And now! But it must not, shall not be! I will keep my soul sacred to this my holy love and heavenly hope! Oh, spirit! look on me through those glorious eyes! give me strength to suffer and be true!"

While this young visionary was yielding to her soul's enthusiasm, Mrs. Thogmorton wrote a hasty note and dispatched it to Red Ridge. Then looking up from her writing-desk, she said,

"I am sorry for her, too, Rose! poor little thing, she suffers a great deal! but what else *can* be done for her? The doctor is as cross as a bear. *Her* plan of going to town and painting pictures for a living, is the most absurd thing that ever was heard of! Austin, even if he were in the country, never would dream of marrying Theodora!"

"Now, you know, I am not so sure of that! Dora has the most taking little face that ever I saw! There is an expression in her countenance, a look from her eyes when she raises them to my face, that seems to drain the very spirit out of my bosom! And I have been used to her all my life, and am besides a woman, and not a very susceptible one at that! There is a deep and exquisite beauty beaming through her pale, transparent face. If I were a young man I am not so sure I shouldn't fall in love with her myself. So I don't wonder at Austin!"

"But her lameness! how can you talk so wildly!"

"But you don't *see* her lameness when she is still; you only see her delicate, spiritual beauty, and even when she moves there is not the least awkwardness or ugliness in her limp. Her motion is as graceful as the flutter of a wounded bird, it excites only the sweetest sympathy for her."

"You will presently tell me that the poor child's lameness is an additional charm."

Rose laughed. "I do not think Austin found it a *counter* charm."

"Well, Rose, Austin is not in the country. I wish he were! and that I was sure of his regard for Theodora; but you must know that there is a wide difference between his taking a poor lame girl out to ride, and—his marrying her!"

"I don't know! Mrs. Malmaison did not think so! I am persuaded that she went to Europe only to take Austin quietly away from Theodora."

"Another reason for giving up hope in that direction;

for if Ada Malmaison sets her face against any thing whatever, no power on earth can bring it to pass. I never saw a woman with such a calm, passionless, irresistible will. There is nothing for poor Dora, but to accept Blaise! the most fortunate thing that could happen to her, did she but know it."

"And when is the precious wedding to come off?"

"To-morrow evening. Invite a few of the neighbors; but don't say any thing about it to her yet! I do not want any scenes."

That same afternoon Blaise made his appearance, and was received by Mrs. Thogmorton alone. His face was all a-glow with blended joy and bashfulness.

"I do not know how to thank my dear Dora! I know I am not near worthy of her in any respect, Mrs. Thogmorton! She looks to me so choice, so refined and delicate, so like a princess that ought to be shielded away from the common rudeness of the world—that I—tremble now that I am sure of her."

Blaise was sitting directly in front of the window, the light of which fell full upon his homely, glowing, ingenuous face; but Mrs. Thogmorton was sitting with her back against the same window, and her face in the deepest shadow. Blaise could not see its expression, and thence labored under the illusion that *she* could not see *his* countenance either, and hence his greater freedom of speech. He continued:

"Could I see Dora, to tell her how happy amd grateful her consent has made me?"

"I think not. She is busily engaged in her preparations. You know there is little time between this and to-morrow evening. And I should think *you* would have sufficient to occupy you. Have your family at home been apprized of what is to take place?"

"Oh, yes! grandmother and Aunt Elizabeth are as busy

as they can be in getting ready to receive Theodora. They sent their greetings by me, and they will be over to-morrow."

"Have you procured the license, and spoken to the minister?"

"Not yet. I did want to speak to *Dora*, first."

"But you cannot! she is as busy as a bee, and as bashful as—herself! You must send your message by me."

Blaise hesitated, a cloud came over his homely face, he said,

"Mrs. Thogmorton, please forgive me for what I am going to ask you; but please also answer me frankly, on your honor as a woman—have you influenced your niece in my favor? Is it to *your* interference that I am indebted for Theodora's late consent?"

There was a pleading earnestness in his honest face that troubled the lady; but she soon recovered her self-possession, and, half laughing, said,

"Perhaps, Mr. Wildman, my reply may wound and offend you?"

"No, it will not, madam! It may be what I half expect! But I shall have no right to be offended! I had rather not owe the possession of Dora's hand to any thing but her own heart. Speak, madam!"

"Very well, I will speak!" answered the lady, with a great show of even rude frankness—"and I will tell *you* plainly, as I told *her*, that I did not entirely approve this intended marriage. I thought you rather a wild, unsettled young man, and I thought Theodora also rather childish, and that you two would not make a very hopeful couple. But finally, believing the happiness of Theodora concerned in this matter, and hoping that *you* would grow more steady and domestic, and *she* more womanly, I have not opposed the wedding. You must forgive me for speaking so plainly."

Basil was completely deceived and overjoyed.

"My dear madam! you make me so happy! But—has

any one influenced Dora in my behalf? I am so much afraid her action may not be voluntary."

"No one has spoken to her on the subject but you and me. If you have any doubts, I must refer you to herself. You can see her to-morrow."

"Oh, dear Mrs. Thogmorton, I am quite satisfied. Indeed I fear it was very rude in me to ask you that question at all; but you see I have Dora's happiness so much at heart. My greatest satisfaction in this world would be in taking care of her, and doing her good; but if, after all—"

"I understand you, Mr. Wildman, and I honor your scruples. I have no doubt that you will make Theodora happy. You will see her to-morrow morning, if you wish it, though I should advise you not to appear until the evening. And now I must wish you good afternoon and dismiss you, for we have both enough to occupy us the remainder of the day."

And so the interview terminated, Blaise returning home to a fool's paradise.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN UNCONSCIOUS BRIDE.

Count Beltram. What dost thou, woman?
Agnes. What I shall answer.
Wait and see!—*Staulle.*

At an early hour the next morning, Rose Garland and her sisters were gathered together in the chamber of the former, busily engaged in making a bridal dress. A pattern-dress had been purloined from the old chest in the attic. As yet Theodora knew nothing of the preparations going forward. At the breakfast-table, however, she heard that

there was company expected for the evening, and was therefore afterward not surprised or curious respecting any bustle of arrangement.

Mrs. Thogmorton had confirmed herself in the thought that she was doing the wisest and the best thing for Theodora, and that all the means were made justifiable by the end. Nevertheless as hour after hour of the forenoon slipped away, bringing nearer the time appointed for the marriage, her courage waned. She found it difficult and well-nigh impossible to go and apprize Theodora of the coming event, which she still resolved should take place.

"What *shall* I do?" she more than once exclaimed. "What *can* I say to her? Was ever a woman in such a predicament?"

At one moment she determined to seem to take it for granted that Theodora knew all, and to let her find out by seeing and hearing what was in progress. At another moment she concluded to go and sit down by her side, tell her, and soothe and coax her into compliance. And she repealed all former resolutions in favor of the plan Napoleonic, of leaving all communications for the last, and then taking her by surprise, and as it were, by storm. And finally that also was abandoned with the despairing exclamation of—

"I am at my wit's end!"

"What is the matter?" inquired the doctor, who had chanced to overhear these words. Now, Mrs. Thogmorton, in her pride of government, had taken no counselor; but being questioned, she nevertheless answered frankly,

"Why, Theodora does not know that she is to be married this evening!"

"Whew-w! and everybody else knows it—that is a pretty spot of work. How on earth does it happen?"

Mrs. Thogmorton condescended to explain at some length—

"And now," said that lady in conclusion, "I do not know

how to break it to her! And the Wildmans are expected here every moment to see her."

"Deny her to them until she shall be prepared."

"I intend to do so, but in an hour or two after them Basil himself will be here, and then what is to be done?"

"Bring forth the bride, to be sure."

"Yes! easy said! But suppose she will not come? Suppose she grows serious and makes a scene?"

"Compose her nerves!"

"Compose her nerves?"

"Yes! and do it before you break the matter to her!"

"I wish you would talk common sense, Doctor Thogmorton! for if you have no more idea of what you are talking about than I have, I am sure you are discoursing an 'infinite deal of nothing.'"

"Can we never talk without quarreling? Very well, then! I am content! only put off the fracas until to-morrow! when we have leisure to come to a misunderstanding!"

"Well, then, go on and tell me what you mean, if you yourself know!"

"Willingly, my dove! If this child up-stairs is likely to give you trouble by her excitability, compose her nerves! I have seen a dying man so composed that he has suffered no anxiety on the subject of his will! Theodora was very pale to-day at dinner. Go into her room and tell her how pale she is! feel her pulse and send for me to prescribe! There! Go at once—there is no time to be lost, for, by Jupiter, there comes the carriage with old Mrs. Wildman and Miss Elizabeth! I will go and receive them while you see Theodora; then I will send you to them while I go to her," said the doctor, hurrying down stairs.

Mrs. Thogmorton found Theodora lying upon her little cot.

"What is the matter, my dear? Are you sick?" she

asked, kindly approaching the bed, and taking the girl's hand.

"No, aunt, dear, only tired," replied Theodora, smiling gratefully at this unwonted tenderness.

"Indeed I am afraid you *are* sick, or are going to be so. I must get your uncle to come up to see you!" said the lady, affectionately, sitting down by the side of the cot and laying her hand upon the forehead of her patient. "I declare your head is quite hot. Yes, indeed, I must get the doctor to see you."

"I assure you it is not necessary, dear aunt. I have only my usual afternoon hour of weariness, I shall rise in a few minutes."

"Your usual afternoon fit of weariness! You do not mean to tell me that you have attacks *every* day?"

Theodora smiled at the seeming earnestness of the lady.

"I fatigue myself every forenoon, and rest for an hour every afternoon. It is at worst only a lazy habit."

"It is very significant! My dear child, let your uncle come to see you!"

"I would rather not, as it is unnecessary!"

"For *my* sake! You know I feel more anxious on your account than ever I did before!"

Again Theodora smiled with a puzzled expression of countenance, but replied,

"Very well, aunt, for your sake let it be then, though I am sure that uncle will find me only lazy."

The lady stooped and pressed—what would have been a Judas kiss to her lips, but that she had persuaded herself that all her contemplated action was "for Theodora's good." Then she went below, and passed into the parlor where the ladies from Red Ridge were waiting for her. After welcoming them she said,

"I cannot ask you to go up into Theodora's room just

yet. Poor dear, she is so painfully shy at all times, and now she is quite indisposed."

"Nothing serious, I hope."

"Oh, no! only nervousness, Miss Elizabeth. She will get over it—but in the mean time, shall I show you your room?"

"Thank you. If you please," replied Miss Elizabeth, speaking for the party. And the hostess conveyed off her guests to their temporary apartments.

Evening came. And the company—without which no country wedding, christening, or funeral can go forward—assembled. Toward seven o'clock Basil came, accompanied by his sister Helen. He was invited into a private sitting-room to await the appearance of his bride. Helen was invited at once into Theodora's presence. As she was leaving the room, Basil said,

"Helen! try to contrive that I see Theodora a few minutes *alone* before the ceremony. Somehow my heart misgives me, and I would like to have a few words with herself."

"Nonsense, Blaise! It is not etiquette, you know!—However, I will see if I can manage it; but in case I should not be able to do so, you had better instruct me with any message you may have for Theodora."

"Thank you, Helen! I hardly know if it would be considered polite for me to send the message—and yet—it would be right! Tell her, Helen, that with all my heart, I put myself and all I possess at her feet for her acceptance, if she takes me of her own free will; but only so; for I could not even be content except in her full happiness. Tell her that, Helen! And do not let her throw herself away to please me or any one."

"I hear, and if it can be managed, I will let you speak to her yourself, if it is only to convince you."

Helen did not say of *what*, in such a case, he was likely

to be convinced, and she knew full well that it could *not* be so "managed" as to afford him an interview.

When she was gone, Blaise walked up and down the sitting-room floor for half an hour, and then passed before a long mirror, and viewed himself from head to foot:—bristling red hair that would *not* lie down, a sun-burned, freckled skin, small, light gray eyes, a clumsy nose, a shapeless mouth, round shoulders, long arms, an awkward form! She never could like him—no, never! She was so symmetrical, so delicate, so graceful! Every one must see the contrast between them, the moment they should stand up together! Every one must see that she could never love him! And yet if she only *could* and *did*, how grateful, how devoted he would be! One thing: *If*—for near as the consummation of his hopes appeared to be, there still seemed to be an "if"—he were so happy, so blessed as to gain her, though he could not be the handsomest, nor the wisest, nor the wealthiest husband in the world, he would be the most loving and disinterested, yes, that he would! that was in his power, and such he would be!

His reveries were interrupted by the entrance of Wakefield Brunton, who was to be his first groomsman, and who came in smiling and grasping the hand of his friend, and wishing him all manner of happiness.

Basil, in a reserved and awkward manner, thanked him. And soon after the door opened, and Helen beckoned Wakefield to her side.

"Wake, my cousin Basil, there, is just as verdant as May clover! Please to tell him that *it is time!*" and so saying, she disappeared as suddenly as she had come.

Wakefield drew down the corners of his mouth, with becoming gravity, and going up to Basil, said, solemnly, "*It is time!*" drew his arm within his own, and marched out of the sitting-room into the hall.

It was dimly lighted by a hanging lamp which neverthe-

less sufficiently revealed a group of ladies standing near the foot of the stairs, as if they had just come down and were waiting.—There was Mrs. Thogmorton and Miss Garland; and there, in the centre of the group, stood Theodora, known by the bridal vail that completely hid her profile. On the side of her stood Helen, her first, and Jane and Mary Garland, her second and third bridesmaids. A little further on were gathered into a group Doctor Thogmorton and two young gentlemen who were to act as second and third groomsmen. Wakefield led Basil into the midst of the ladies group, and presented him immediately before his bride, where poor Blaise stood abashed and hesitating—

"You are to draw her arm in yours and follow *us!* Oh, heaven mend your wits!" exclaimed Helen, in a fierce stage whisper.

Mary and her cavalier had led the way; Jane with hers had followed. Helen took Wakefield's arm, and went after.

And somehow Blaise found himself with a little delicate gloved hand resting calmly on his left coat sleeve, bringing up the rear. It did not shrink, nor tremble—that little hand! It lay there coolly and quietly. He stole a timid look up at the face above it—the face was no paler nor rosier than usual—the eyes were not downcast nor tearful—they did not meet, neither did they avoid his gaze—they looked straight forward the way that they were going. Her look and manner revealed nothing; it was very strange! He tried to speak once or twice—but the words—"stuck in his throat." At last, just as they were entering the saloon, he managed to falter out,

"Theodora! My Dora!"

But she whom he addressed never gave the slightest indication of her having heard him, while Helen looked over her shoulder with a severe expression of countenance, that said as plainly as words could speak,

"You clown! can't you hold your tongue, and behave with propriety?"

And Blaise fearing that he had been guilty of some great breach of etiquette, blushed deeply, and was silent.

And the next instant, with his senses all reeling, he found himself and Theodora standing together in the centre of a semicircle, ranged before the clergyman, who, book in hand, lost no time in beginning the solemn exhortation that opens the marriage ritual. Blaise dared not glance at the spectators around, or at the bride on his left hand, or the friend on his right, or at the minister of God before him; he kept his eyes fixed upon the carpet. When the time came for him to make his responses, he stammered forth, in a low voice, the words the clergyman put in his mouth. A few seconds after he started, on hearing the sound of the woman's response, the tones, low as they were, were not so soft as those of Theodora, they sounded more like those of Helen! But, of course, that must have been only his fancy, he immediately thought; for the ceremony continued and concluded; and then he found himself giddy in the little whirl of congratulations, that presently whirled him with his party off to a distant sofa.

"How lifeless!" "How cold!" "How strange!" were some of the phrases, that even in that confusion of tongues struck his mind, chiefly because he wondered to whom they would apply.

He glanced up at Theodora seated on his left—the same calm, colorless face, the same quiet eye and composed manner. He wished to address her, but he could not find any thing to say, so fearful was he of making another signal breach of good manners, so he confined his conversation to answering speeches that were made to him by the young bridesmaids and groomsmen, and by such transient interlocutors as came up to pay their compliments to the bride's group.

And still such criticisms upon some unknown, as, "Queer, isn't she?" "It is really offensive." "What does it mean?" floated in his ear.

Refreshments were served. That was some relief! Basil could not have swallowed a morsel *then*, if his soul's salvation had depended on his doing so. But it was some divertisement to busy himself with the pretense. Wakefield was offering jelly, cream, lemonade, wine, all in turn to Theodora, who neither accepting nor rejecting any thing, sat as if unconscious of the attentions being lavished upon her. Wakefield was surprised into giving one deep, investigating glance into her passive countenance, and then with a sudden paleness, turned away, and gave his services to the young bridesmaids. Blaise saw all this.

"What is the matter? Is she angry, or merely abstracted?" he inquired of himself; and looking at her more attentively, he added—"Yes! certainly! it is of *her* coldness they are talking! Theodora—my Dora!" he whispered earnestly in her ear.

She turned and gave him a vague, perplexed look, but did not otherwise reply.

"My dear Dora, what is the mat—"

Blaise started abruptly, leaving his sentence half finished, for Helen had given him a sly, severe pinch.

The musicians had now entered and taken their places, and were tuning up their instruments for service. The young people present were impatiently waiting for the bridal party to lead off in forming quadrilles.

"Wakefield! Theodora cannot dance, and of course Basil will not. It falls therefore upon you and me, to head the first quadrille. Come!" And the witch led her captive off. Captain Castlemain followed with Rose Garland, and sets rapidly formed, and the dancing commenced.

At a hint from their mother, Jane and Mary Garland, with their respective companions, had remained to keep

Basil in conversation. Theodora sat in the same quiet apathy, replying to any address with only that vague, perplexed, half-conscious gaze, that filled Basil with sorrow, and all other observers with vain conjectures. If any of these latter found expression in Mrs. Thogmorton's presence, she would with a smile reply—

"Oh! you know she is a very singular girl, unused to company and excitement, which always drives her in upon herself; and besides, to-night she is really very seriously indisposed."

This explanation found only partial favor among her hearers.

At ten o'clock the dancing ceased temporarily, while the company went to supper. Wakefield gave his arm to Theodora, while Basil took Mary Garland to the table. After the supper, which lasted but an hour, many of the guests returned to the saloon, and the dancing recommenced.

It had been arranged that Theodora should, the same night of her marriage, go home with her husband's family. Accordingly, a little after eleven o'clock, while some of the guests were still at table in the supper-room, and others were dancing in the saloon, the carriage from Red Ridge was brought to the door, a traveling trunk packed by Mrs. Thogmorton, and containing all things necessary for her niece's present use, was strapped on behind, and Theodora, in the same strange apathy that had marked her deportment the whole evening, was wrapped in traveling shawl and hood, and handed in. Helen, Basil, old Mrs. Wildman, and Miss Elizabeth, all found room in that capacious old-fashioned carry-all.

"What *is* the matter with Theodora?" inquired Mrs. Wildman in a whisper, of Helen.

"Oh! nothing, grandma, she is dreaming, that is all," replied the young lady; "dreaming awake; let her alone."

But the next morning, while Doctor and Mrs. Thogmorton, and their three daughters, were sitting around a late breakfast-table, laughing and talking over the cleverness with which they had married off that impracticable girl, they were startled by the sudden apparition of Basil Wildman, who, unannounced, burst into their presence, pale, haggard, and shaking with mental disturbance.

"Mr. Wildman! Basil! for heaven's sake what is the matter!" exclaimed the doctor, and Mrs. Thogmorton in a breath.

"Theodora!" cried Basil in a voice of anguish.

"Theodora! why, what about her?"

"Oh, Heaven! ill—ill to death! mad! dying, I think. Oh! Mrs. Thogmorton! if you have deceived me, and destroyed her—may the Lord—*never* forgive you!"

"Basil! how wildly you talk! but under the circumstances I must excuse you! Theodora is sick (she was not very well yesterday) and you are crazy about it. That is just all. I am very sorry for you both. You came for the doctor, I suppose? He will go over, of course, immediately."

"I came for you both. She is dying,—dying, I tell you!" said Blaise, wringing his hands.

"Nonsense! you are needlessly alarmed, Basil," said the lady, growing nevertheless pale, in contradiction of her own words.

The doctor, who had at once arisen from the table, and rung for his horse to be saddled, was now drawing on his overcoat. "I think you need not come until you hear from me, Maria. If she is as ill as he fears, I will send a messenger for you. I am ready to attend you now, Mr. Wildman," said the doctor, nodding good morning to his family as he went out. Basil stopped for no such ceremony, but followed the doctor to hurry his motions.

Basil's terror had not much exaggerated the case. Doc-

tor Thogmorton found Theodora extremely ill and quite delirious. Mrs. Wildman was fidgeting around her bed in the last degree of helpless, nervous excitability. Almost the first thing the doctor did was to dismiss the good old lady to her housekeeping, and install Miss Elizabeth as nurse. Then he administered the remedies that seemed to be indicated, and sat down by the bed-side of his patient to watch the effect. For hours he sat there, repeating at intervals the dose, and waiting with the greatest anxiety the result. How much of compassion for the poor betrayed girl before him, and how much of remorse for his own share in her possible destruction, and how much fear for the ultimate consequences of the act, mingled in his feelings of solicitude, it is impossible to say. But there he sat, earning "golden opinions" from all the family for his devotion to the suffering girl. Toward evening the dangerous symptoms that he had combated through the day, began to yield. And rising, he pronounced immediate peril past, and gave Miss Elizabeth full directions for the treatment of the sufferer during the night, requesting that in case of necessity he might at any hour whatever be summoned, and then took his leave. In going out of the sick chamber, he stumbled and nearly fell over the prostrate form of Basil, who had thrown himself down on the floor outside of the door, and who started up, seized the doctor's hand and holding him prisoner, implored a true report of Theodora's condition, and if possible, permission for himself to go in and sit by her.

"She is more composed, my poor fellow, and if you can control your feelings sufficiently to keep quiet, you may go in there and sit with her."

Basil wrung the doctor's hand in gratitude, and availed himself of the permission given him.

Doctor Thogmorton, on reaching home, told his wife that although he had found her niece quite as ill as she had been represented, yet as she was also too delirious

to recognize any one, he had thought it unadvisable to summon her.

Days and weeks passed while Theodora hovered between life and death. The first of January arrived, the time appointed for the doctor's family to begin their journey southward, yet as Theodora still continued extremely ill, her relatives could not in common propriety leave the neighborhood. When, however, near the first February she was pronounced convalescent, her aunt sent over the remainder of her effects, consisting chiefly of her card and painting materials, to Red Ridge; and the next day, accompanied by the whole family, came over to bid adieu—*a Dieu*—"to God" indeed the fragile, suffering creature needed to be committed.

"I am very glad to leave you so well provided for, my dear Theodora! I trust you will be quite happy. Though, as I said before, Basil is not exactly the man I should have chosen for you, yet as you seemed destined to marry him, I will say no more upon *that* point. He is certainly very devoted to you. Good-by my love. I shall mail a letter to you from Baltimore. Basil must answer it. And as soon as you are well enough, you also must write to me," said the lady, on taking leave of her niece.

They left the next day.

One would not have thought it, but even this parting from relatives who had never been very kind to her, was so painful to the sensitive girl, who considered it as the breaking of the last link that held her to her girlish life, that in her weak, impressible state it caused a relapse that threw back her recovery several weeks. Basil was now her devoted nurse. The gentlest woman could not have been more gentle. His solicitous love seemed to endow him with the tact, skill, and tenderness, that only experience usually gives.

A busy and critical season was approaching for the

farmer—but Basil, with an eye single to Theodora, let the interests of his farm take care of themselves, or be taken care of by whomsoever listed to assume the trouble and responsibility.

Poor old Mrs. Wildman sighed over the state of affairs, and once even complained to Miss Elizabeth—

"It is not that I have any unkind feelings toward the little creature, especially as the love of her sweet face keeps Blaise out of bad company, but it does seem so hard, that after all my struggles to get along in the world, Blaise could not have picked out a fine hearty woman with property, and some power of work in her, to be a helpmeet for him. And now here is his girl of a wife not only unable to help him, but taking all his time up to attend to her. I do think I am the most afflicted—" and here the long-suffering old lady broke down and wept.

"Oh! no you are not the most afflicted. This delicate young lady to whom Basil's own heart has led him, will save and reform him as no wife of your picking out would have done," replied Miss Elizabeth.

This conversation occurred one evening while the old lady was laying the cloth for tea; and Miss Elizabeth, as usual in mild weather, was sitting sewing by the open window. When the supper was placed upon the table, the latter took a cup of tea and a piece of toast, and carried them up stairs to Theodora, with the intention also of relieving the watch of Basil, while he should come down to join the family at their evening meal. Basil had scarcely reached the kitchen, when he perceived Jim, who had been dispatched to Eyrie for lemons and some other necessaries for the use of the sick girl, approaching and holding up with great glee, three letters in his hands—

"A half of a half dozen, Marse Blaise! An' Marse Pos'office say how dey's bin dere near two week!"

Getting a letter at Red Ridge was such a very rare and

almost unprecedented event, that the master was nearly as much excited at the view of them as the man had been.

"Where upon the face o' the yeth would so many letters a come from!" exclaimed old Mrs. Wildman, while Helen and Miss Nelly Parrott, drew near and peeped over Basil's shoulder.

"One is from New Orleans, for me," said Blaise.

"Yes! that's from Mrs. Thogmorton," said the old lady.

"Who's t'others from?"

"I don't—exactly—know," said Blaise, in a hesitating, troubled manner, looking at the other letters.

"One is marked Hav—Hav—something—"

"Oh! *Havre.* They are foreign letters—hand them here, and let me look at them," exclaimed Helen, impatiently.

"Forring letters! hand 'em here this minit. I reckon they're for me. Who else should they be for, indeed! Who but me, has rich relations in forring parts to leave them fortins?" exclaimed Miss Nelly Parrott, in great excitement, attempting to take the letters from Helen, who now had them in her own possession.

"Hands off! The letters are directed to Theodora."

"Theodora, indeed! who has *she* got in forring parts?"

"Give me Theodora's letters to keep for her, Helen," interrupted Blaise.

Helen reluctantly returned them, Miss Parrott taking an opportunity to peer at their superscription, to satisfy herself that there was fair play in their detention by the present parties.

"Come! read your own letter Blaise! I want to know how the doctor's family get on," requested old Mrs. Wildman.

"I wish you'd all sit down to the table, and eat your suppers like Christians. Such a fuss about letters! Well,

they *are* rarities in this poor, low-life house, that's a fact!" exclaimed Miss Nelly, who had now lost all interest in the family correspondence.

"Sit down, Miss Nelly, and I will wait on you," said the most amiable old lady in the whole world. "Sit down all of you and Basil, you can read your letter out loud, while I make the tea, and Helen helps Miss Nelly to ham and tongue."

This little matter being amicably settled, Mrs. Thogmorton's missive was read. It only announced the safe arrival of herself and family at New Orleans, and expressed their anxious desire to hear news of Theodora by letter, that must be directed to Galveston, the next place of their temporary sojourn. After finishing the perusal, Blaise laid the letter on the table for Miss Elizabeth to read, hastily swallowed a cup of tea and a few mouthfuls of bread, and immediately left the table, and hurried off up to Theodora's room.

"That boy will kill himself, with waiting on Theodora," said old Mrs. Wildman, sighing.

"Humph! hope it 'ill *last*," benevolently observed Miss Parrot.

"He doesn't eat enough to keep a bird alive, Nelly," sighed the old lady deprecatingly.

"It's enough to keep a jackass alive, it seems," was the second comment of this affable creature.

Helen, had any one been sufficiently interested in her to observe it, might have been detected in neglecting her supper quite as much as Basil had; she ate nothing, but mused and crumbled her bread; her thoughts ran upon those letters; she knew they were from Austin Malmaison; she would have given—a fraction of her honor, to have seen the contents of those epistles; but that while they remained in the possession of Basil, the seals were as sacred as the holy stone she knew; however there was nothing like trying that question, "Oft expectation, etc."

That night while Theodora slept soundly, she went up

stairs, and offered to relieve Basil's watch; and upon his expected refusal to leave Theodora's side, begged and obtained permission at least to share it.

"Does talking in a low voice disturb her?" asked Helen.

"No, not now! for when she sleeps at all, it is so heavy that it's like death," groaned Basil.

"Very well! I am glad of it, for I have something to say to you that concerns your happiness, and she must not hear."

"Helen, I do not mean to begin by having any secrets from Theodora! it would seem like treachery."

"Hem! 'hope it may last,' as Miss Nelly observes! Has she no secrets from *you*?"

"I don't know! hereafter she will not have any wrong ones, I am *sure!*"

"*Hem-m-m!* hope *that* may last, also! Very well, then! The subject of our conversation this evening you need not keep secret from her, if, when she is able to hear of it, you see fit to tell her!"

"Well, then, what is it?"

"Do you know whom those letters came from?"

"Yes!" sighed Blaise, "I suppose I do!—they came from—from that—handsome—wealthy—book-learned—Austin Malmaison!"

"Did you know that he was Theodora's lover?—and that *that* was the reason why Mrs. Malmaison took him off to Europe?"

"I—thought so!" choked Blaise.

"And now then! She knows nothing of those letters! you have a right to open and read them! to possess yourself of the contents—and—the—relations in which those two stand toward each other—when he went to Europe—that—would put you into a position to—know how to act in the premises."

"Helen Wildman! you are yourself, this moment, stam-

mering for shame at what you want me to do!" said Blaise, warmly.

"Well!" exclaimed Helen, hastily, "if you look at it so prudishly, at least you have the privilege of suppressing the letters, which, under the circumstances, I think would be best, as the perusal of their contents might make her very unhappy in her present position."

"Helen! you make me mad! Now I tell you what I shall do. I shall keep these letters carefully, until Theodora is able to read them. *Then*—mind you!—I shall not give them to her with my own hands, as if I wished to see how she would take them, and wanted to know what was in them—no!—but I shall leave them on her table, so that she may find them when she is alone, and read them without interruption. I shall never name the letters to her; but if afterward she chooses to give me her confidence, she may do so! The Lord knows I am afraid the poor, unhappy girl has been hardly and deceitfully enough dealt with, but I have had no hand in her injuries—for I myself was deceived! But it is too late now to help it! all that is left for me to do is—to act right."

Ah! poor Basil! what is left for any of us, in any strait to do, but simply—right!

As Theodora recovered, Basil gradually absented himself from her presence; that was a part of the self-denying rule that he had laid down for himself out of delicate regard to her.

One morning when she was well enough to come down into the parlor, he came in bringing her a bunch of the first white lilies of the season, and finding her alone, he left the two letters on the table, beside the vase of lilies, where she would not fail to see the superscription for herself. And then he withdrew, and went around into the door yard, and, to his utilitarian mother's high disapproval, occupied him-

self with planting a white jessamine vine, that he might train it up to Theodora's chamber window.

Meantime, she sat there thinking how delicate and disinterested the affection of this poor uncultivated Basil really was—how impossible that he should have been a cognizant party to that base conspiracy by which her freedom and her peace had been sacrificed, and conjecturing, as she often did now, what could have caused that fatal apathy of intellect and will, which had left her, on the evening of her marriage, an easy victim to that bitter treachery. But through all this, the lilies, unthought of, were wooing her notice. She turned her eyes toward them, and her glance fell upon the letters. She impulsively caught them up, growing pale at the sight of the familiar hand-writing. She looked at each in turn, and opened first the one of latest date.

HOTEL D'A——, RUE DE V——, PARIS.

MY OWN DEAREST ONE—Though I wrote half a dozen letters from Havre, and from this city, on Monday, Tuesday, and yesterday, yet I cannot refrain from writing to you again to-day. And indeed, even when the pen is not in my hand, I am still, in thought, writing to you. Every new impression that I receive here, refers itself directly to you, even as memory and as hope speak constantly of you. Such folios I think over to you, that, were there any sun power of daguerreotyping thought, your studio could not hold the heart pictures I should send you. Yesterday I described our visit to the Louvre; but to-day I write with another purpose, for I shall not go again to a gallery of art, until I can do so in attendance upon my dearest lady. My heart's dearest Theodora! My soul's best, earthly good! May I call you so at last? May I assume that you have recognized the consecration of that heart that has long been wholly your own? And that you have not disdained its offering? It is needless to inform you, my own, what my whole

life, since our first meeting, must have told you, how long and devotedly I have loved you, how earnestly I have aspired to the possession of your love. But it is necessary, my dearest, to explain why, while all my conduct spoke one language to you, my lips did not specially confirm it. A promise given long ago to my mother, to the effect that I should form no matrimonial engagement, without her consent, until after my majority, has hitherto sealed my lips. How I longed for the time to arrive that should set me free. It has come; to-day I am twenty-one; and the first use I make of my newly-fledged freedom is to lay it at my lady's feet. My own Theodora! the sea separates us, yet I could not refrain, in this first moment of my power do so, to write you this letter. Very soon in person I will follow it—and—"

—No more! she could read no more! Slowly, slowly, word by word, line by line, the miserable facts of happiness, unspeakable as unhoped for, so nearly secured, so irretrievably lost, had gathered around her consciousness, oppressing, crushing her to the earth. For a little while she had resisted the fatal weight, and summoning what fortitude she possessed, compelled herself to read on—and then her strength utterly failed, her head sunk upon her bosom, her arms dropped by her sides, the letter fell from her relaxed fingers, and she fainted.

The sound of a soft fall reached the vigilant ears of Basil, who dropped his spade in alarm and ran in, raised her in his arms, and loudly calling for help, laid her on the lounge.

And even in that excitement, while the family were hastening into the room, and Basil's eyes fell upon the open letter on the floor, he picked it up, and thrust it out of sight into his bosom.

Old Mrs. Wildman sighed and groaned, and amid her sympathy for Theodora, pitied herself likewise, that just

now in corn planting time, they should be afflicted with this delicate, invalid girl. And she directed Basil to take her up stairs into her chamber that she had left too soon, she said.

A severe illness followed this event. Again Basil was her unwearied nurse. The first object that met her eyes on her returning consciousness, was the pale, worn, anxious face of her poor, unpolished, lover-husband. In all this, under all the superficial ruggedness and awkwardness and ignorance, there was a real vital germ of wisdom, goodness and spiritual beauty, that a fine, penetrating spirit, like that of Theodora, could not fail to recognize in Basil.

When she was finally convalescent, Basil was subpœnaed to attend a trial at the county town, and left her for an absence of several days. Now, had his manner to her been many degrees less considerate and delicate, she must have rejoiced at a deliverance, however short, from his company. As it was, she missed him—missed the kind, attentive countenance, that for her had no other expression but the most affectionate solicitude, that in her suffering was clouded over with sorrow, and when she was better was lighted up with joy. Basil loved her with a pure, deep, strong affection, and he was the only one in the family that did so. Old Mrs. Wildman, Miss Elizabeth, and Helen, were as kind as they could possibly be; but through all their attentions and services, Theodora's fine sense perceived that she was only compassionated as a delicate, suffering girl, and barely tolerated in the light of a daughter. Basil loved her just as she was, loved her devotedly, notwithstanding her helplessness. And from her soul she pitied Basil, and wondered at the strange destiny that had inspired him with so absorbing love for one who could never respond to it—never! For though it has been said that, on one hand, "pity is akin to love," and though that may possibly be true with man's protecting instinct—yet "pity" is also too nearly

allied to "contempt" on the other hand, for the love of woman, which is essentially a dependence and an aspiration.

At the end of a week Basil returned. Theodora was in the back piazza that opened behind the parlor, where he sought her presence. There was no misapprehending the light of joy that broke over his countenance as he caught sight of her. But the very gladness of his expression was subdued as he approached and inquired after her welfare. She received and replied to him kindly; how could she else? After a little he drew from his pocket a letter, and putting it in her hand, said,

"I picked this up just after you had dropped it, dear Theodora. I need not surely tell you that no eye but your own has seen its contents."

"I am sure of that. Now, will you please do me another favor—will you go and burn this letter? and this other also?" she added, drawing from her pocket the one which had accompanied it.

"This! why, you have not read it—the seal has not been broken!" said Basil inquiringly.

"Nor ever will be broken. It does not matter now; please go."

Without another word, Basil took the letters and went and consigned them to the kitchen fire. Returning, he found Theodora very pale, but, outwardly at least, calm. Sinking down by her side, kneeling, and half-embracing the back of the little chair she occupied, with the strange, beautiful blending of adoration and of protection that distinguished his whole bearing toward her, he said,

"Theodora, there is something that must be explained between us. Dear Theodora, looking back upon all the circumstances of our marriage, I have been afraid that you were not a free agent when you gave me your dear hand—

I have been afraid that you were acting upon compulsion—"

He paused, but as she made no comment, he went on.

"This is what I wanted to say, dear Theodora, that had I believed you were acting against your own free will, I would have died—yes, a thousand deaths!—before I would have been concerned in such wickedness! Oh, Theodora, tell me that you believed this of me!"

"I do, I do indeed believe it, Basil. I was always sure that you could not have been a consenting party to that—deception."

"Deception—Theodora?"

"Yes—there was no compulsion—they drugged me, Basil! gave me something that half palsied my intellect, and quite palsied my will—then they dressed me, and brought me down to you. It was my motive power, rather than my understanding, that was affected—for I remember all, and can recall my feelings. I knew, or partly knew, what was going on around me—but it seemed to be a dream, from which I had no power to awake."

"I'll—strangle that man the first time I meet him!" exclaimed Basil, growing black in the face.

"A sin is its own severest punishment, Basil. What I have just told you, was not intended to excite indignation, but simply that you might know all the facts; for little is left us to hope, but from perfect candor toward each other. Basil; I believe that you also were deceived?"

"Deceived! They sent me kind messages from you, and invitations that brought me back to the house, and then they brought me your acceptance of my poor suit. And when I begged to see you, to hear from your own lips the confirmation of my happiness, they put me off with ingenious evasions. Oh! but that my too selfish love had blinded me, I might have known they were playing some

desperate game. Oh! if I could but meet that man! when I do, but one of us will ever leave the spot alive!"

"Thank heaven, you will not be likely to meet him. They deceived themselves, before they deceived us. They reasoned themselves into the belief that they were doing us a service, and that the end justified the means. They believed the marriage a desirable one for all parties—they had no time to spend in combating what they had decided to be fantastical objections, hence they determined to bring matters to a crisis, and by *stratagem*—for believe me, they have not called their act by so harsh a name as—treachery."

"Yet it was the blackest, most atrocious treachery! How *can* you forgive them and even seek to palliate their wickedness?"

"Because I must! The very instinct of self-preservation, drives me to find excuses for them. It were too horrible—too agonizing to believe that they knew what they did, and yet could do it. Our Saviour on the cross prayed for his executioners—'Father, forgive them, for *they know not what they do.*' That 'they know not what they do,' is the truth I think of most wrong-doers. Loathe the sin as much as possible, yet judge mercifully of the sinner."

"I cannot make that fine distinction. I do not know sin except through the *sinner*. Besides, the sinner creates the sin, not sin the sinner."

"Then don't create another sin of anger. Judge kindly as you can. They nursed me tenderly while I was ill."

"Aye! I suppose they rather preferred that you should recover, than that they should have the guilt of murder on their souls. Well, let them pass for the present, Theodora. Oh! let me hold your dear hand a little, just while I speak to you. It is so sweet to hold it, and I will never ask it again. This is what I feel bound to say to you—that ceremony at Mount Storm has given me no claim whatever to your confidence or affection, until your own words confirm

it. A sort of right of guardianship, I must hold, or seem to hold, else you would have no protection until your friends from abroad return—then, Theodora, you are the mistress of your own fate; an exposition of the treachery by which your consent seemed to be gained, a nine days' wonder, a legal formula, and you are free," said Basil, in a choking voice, pressing the hand that he thought, in dropping then, he was resigning forever.

"And you, Basil?" she asked, after a pause.

"Back to my plow—back among my oxen—almost content if I leave you happy."

She held out to him again the hand he had dropped.

"Dear Basil, I have never seen any one so generous as you—never. The Lord bless you, and the Lord guide us both."

No more was said for the next few minutes, and then the entrance of Helen broke in upon the interview.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A STRANGE HONEYMOON.

Can I bless thee, my beloved,—can I bless thee?
What blessing word can I
From my own tears keep dry?
What flowers grow in my fields wherewith to dress thee?
My goods revert to ill,
My binding up would break thee,
My crownings curse and kill—
Alas! I can but love thee:
May God bless thee, my beloved! may God bless thee!

—*Elizabeth Barrett Browning.*

THE spring advanced, yet Theodora's friends came not back. Her life seemed pausing, or ebbing. Like a young tree taken up and planted in some ungenial soil and clime,

that cannot strike root and grow, but droops and drops its leaves even in Spring, so Theodora, rudely snatched from the dream-life of her studio, and dropped down amid the sternest realities of common-place life, drooped in spirit and body. The delicate mind so rudely shocked, trembled nearly into the chaos of insanity; and had her sympathies and affections been so introverted as to be concentrated upon her own wrongs and sufferings, the sudden rupture of all her heart-ties, the blight of all her hopes and aspirations, must have driven her to insanity. But her sympathies and affections went out to others, making, first bearable, then beautiful, her life; for love creates beauty—goes forth blessing, and returns blessed. "The sorrow of this world worketh death." And had Theodora's heart been a selfish heart, it must, through its extreme tenderness and sensitiveness, have broken under such trials; but it was a loving heart, and its sympathies went forth in kindness to all around her. There are two sorts of sensibility, one that is only an intensity of self-love, and another that is a quickness of sympathy. The first will magnetize to itself only evil where much is good. The last will attract the good.

Thus Theodora could not be offended at the unconventional manners, and the ungrammatical language of her rugged mother-in-law; to her apprehension, there was a certain quaint picturesqueness in the old lady's manners and conversation, while she gave the greatest respect to that thorough honesty of heart and life, and that predominant devotion to her grand-children that had inspired and supported her through an old age of unremitting toil.

At dawn, old Mrs. Wildman would be up and out, blowing her horn to rouse up her laborers, and would spend two or three hours before breakfast in trudging from field to field, and "seeing with her own eyes" that they did not neglect their work. Then she would come in to attend to the coffee and hot rolls. After breakfast, she would give out

provisions for dinner, and then go out to the field again, and remain overseeing and directing her laborers until noon. Then in again, tired, heated, and nearly worn out. Now had not Basil and Helen been habituated, from infancy, to this sight, they never could have looked upon it with so much indifference. But, "habit is second nature." To Theodora's unaccustomed eyes, this was shocking. And soon she was irresistibly drawn out to give the old woman such aid and comfort as her own fragile frame could afford. Against her coming in at noon, Theodora would have her large flag-bottomed arm-chair placed at the shadiest window, and a basin of water and a towel brought, and a tumbler of wine and water prepared; and when the old lady appeared at the door, panting, and nearly fainting with fatigue, she would go and relieve her of her walking-stick and her sun bonnet, and take her to the chair. And poor old Mrs. Wildman, totally unaccustomed to any such consideration from her family, would be as much embarrassed as pleased by this attention, and would say, as she sunk breathless into the seat, and received the glass of cool sangaree—

"Thanky, child, thanky. Don't trouble yourself so much about me, child. I aint been used to it, you know; and may-be when I do get to looking for it like, then you might get tired offerin' it."

"No, it is a pleasure to me, and I never should get tired of doing this trifle for you—such a trifle! hardly enough to prove my good-will to do more if I could."

"La! poor child, what could you do? You mustn't think how any of us expects it of you!" said old Mrs. Wildman, at that moment freely forgiving Theodora her supposed uselessness.

Theodora's kindness did not stop there. In many ways a less loving heart would not have found she was enabled to help and comfort the old lady, and all so quietly and unobtrusively, too, that none but the recipient of her good offi-

ces, and Basil, who never was indifferent where Theodora was concerned, perceived them.

"Why do you take so much trouble for grandmother, Dora?—she don't care for comforts like other people! she is not used to them."

"Oh! Basil, she is so old and works so hard! and lives so hard!"

"Bless you, daughter! she doesn't care! Granny don't mind! She's used to it."

"'She's used to it!' Oh, has her long, long labors and self-denial and patience so blinded you? Have you so missed their teachings? Because she seldom complains, do you think that she never suffers? Because she does not give up, do you think she never exhausts her strength? Think! seventy years old!" said Theodora, looking earnestly into Basil's face, and conveying more by that look than by many words.

The tears sprang into Basil's eyes.

"Indeed, I never once thought about it in that light, never! I'm afraid I've been a very great brute, Theodora. But, please the Lord, I won't be so any longer. I'll try little by little to shift the burden entirely off her shoulders on to my own; she would not trust me all at once; she has got in the habit of thinking me untrustworthy—and with good reason, I am afraid, Theodora."

Basil was as good as his word. From that day forth there was no more negligence. He rose with the dawn, summoned and set his people to work, and remained with them. The old lady at first believed this only a spasmodic effort on the part of Basil, who had never before attempted to take the direction of affairs, but had always confined his labor on the farm to driving a team, helping in harvest time, and "doing jobs." She thought this new interest would not last long. But she was mistaken. It did last, and Basil, who, from a newly awakened sense of duty had entered upon the work,

continued it because he began to feel interest and pleasure in the task.

And Theodora saw nothing ridiculous in Miss Elizabeth's quaint family pride, but respected its better fruits, such as that liberality of heart and mind, which in the midst of privation could not realize poverty but quietly persisted in dispensing bounty, and that exquisite personal neatness that threw over her cheapest and coarsest of garments the air of elegance and refinement. And she honored that pure benevolence that rendered her so careful never to wound the feelings of others, and that persevering industry that kept her at her sewing-table, day after day, the year around, for the benefit of the family. Theodora soon drew a second chair to Miss Elizabeth's solitary work-table and asked for sewing.

"Pray, do not trouble yourself to assist me, my dear. The work is not pressing, nor am I hurried."

"But I am lonesome, and do not know what to do with myself, Miss Elizabeth."

"Oh! in that case, I will cheerfully lay aside my sewing and walk or ride with *you*."

"By no means, dear Miss Elizabeth. I feel like sitting down and sewing and talking with you, if it will not disturb you."

"Disturb me, my dear! It would both assist and enliven me. The only consideration is yourself."

"Oh! it will do me good."

Miss Elizabeth was making up summer clothing for the negro women. She took the skirt of a striped cotton gown from the basket of cut-out work at her side, and handed it to Theodora. And the two were soon busily engaged. And from that day Theodora spent her forenoons at Miss Elizabeth's work-table; Miss Nelly Parrott remaining near, because in the presence of "Mrs. Basil," as she now called her, she enjoyed certain immunity from torment by Helen, who had discovered that her persecution of that poor, ec-

centric creature were annoying to Theodora, and who, strange as it may appear, would do nothing to disturb the latter. Indeed, next to Basil, Helen was the most solicitous for Theodora's comfort and happiness. There was nothing that Helen would not do to please and cheer Theodora. Often, the latter raising her eyes suddenly would meet the wistful gaze of Helen fixed sorrowfully, remorsefully upon herself. And once, at that very table, where Helen, for a wonder, had drawn up a third chair and put on her thimble to help Miss Elizabeth and Theodora to finish a piece of work, she suddenly inquired,

"Theodora, don't you think some people do wrong because they cannot possibly help it? because it is their nature to do so? even as it is the nature of all created things to yield fruit after their kind? Can the crab-apple help being sour? or the aloe bitter? the nettle prickly? or the deadly night-shade poisonous? And can certain human creatures help being fiery, passionate, and self-willed as their natures oblige them to be? Pray answer me; I asked for your opinion."

Theodora could not answer on the spur of the moment. She knew well enough what the answer should be, but how to put her thoughts in words? She could have painted a scene on canvas that would have represented it better than her words could convey it.

"You do not answer me, Theodora. Then I suppose I am right."

"No, you are wrong! Persons of the temperament you speak of, may not be able to prevent the *impulses* of passion and self-will, but they *are* able *at first* to resist them. If, however, they choose to persuade themselves that these impulses are destinies, not to be resisted, of course, by indulgence, they become irresistible. 'God is not mocked,' and neither has He mocked us, by leaving us exposed to

more evil within and without, than we can by His grace, control."

For an answer Helen sighed deeply; but presently, laughing recklessly and throwing down the coarse shirt she was at work upon, she said she believed that she would go to the post-office and see if there were letters, and, going to the door, she called Jim and bade him saddle Kit and bring her to the house.

And soon Helen had donned her riding-skirt and hat and mounted the family nag, and was galloping on her road up to Eyrie. Three powers moved her to that expedition. Compunction, that drove her away from the sight of Theodora's deathly pale and sad, though loving face; the restless desire for motion; and lastly, a presentiment that attracted her to the post-office.

A presentiment that, for a wonder, did not deceive her; for there was a foreign letter directed in the handwriting of Austin Malmaison to Basil Wildman—such a huge letter—that the longer she looked at it, the more wonderful it seemed.

She put whip to her horse and let no grass grow under his feet until she was home again.

She sprang from her saddle, called Jim, threw him the reins, and ran into the kitchen where the family were all gathered around the supper-table. She was determined that there should be no concealments and suppressions of *this* packet, so she laid it down before Basil, in sight of all, saying,

"There, Blaise! there is a most astonishing packet from 'foreign parts,' as Miss Parrot calls the sunrise side of the world. Do open it at once, and tell us all about it."

While the family looked on with the most intense interest, Basil open the great envelope. It contained four other packets—three of them were letters, and the fourth was a large engrossed and folded paper of several pages. Two of the letters, Basil, on glancing at, put quietly into

his pocket; and to the questions and remonstrances of Helen and his grandmother, he answered—"By-and-by! By-and-by," and proceeded to unfold and look over the engrossed paper; and then his face deeply flushed, and seizing the remaining letter, he hastily opened and read it—then dropping both, he covered his face with his hands, started up and left the table. All arose in dismay, and followed him.

"What is it? For the Lord's sake, what is it? Have you got into any new trouble, Basil?" asked the poor old woman, who was the first to find her voice.

"No, mother, no ma'am—no trouble at all. Joy for *you.*"

"Basil? Joy? What joy? Will Ingot and Co. buy the wheat? Well now! what makes you go on so? What *is* the matter?"

"Oh! nothing—it is nothing but just a goodness and a generosity; yes! a magnanimity that leaves me nothing to say or to do! that just crushes me! Here! read this—but stop—wait one minute," said Basil, going up to Theodora, who had lingered near the table, and taking the first two letters from his pocket, he said, "My little Dora, here is your part of the mail. Go to your room and read them, while I satisfy mother—afterward I will tell you all about it."

Theodora eagerly clasped her prizes—and thanking Basil with a look, escaped to her own room to peruse them.

When she was gone, Basil snatched up the paper and the letter from the table on which he had let them fall, and hurrying back to where his grandmother and sister stood, he exclaimed, hastily, excitedly,

"Oh! think of it! *only* think of it! I married the girl he loved—and—look at his revenge!"

Helen grew very pale, and grasped the back of the chair behind which she stood, while Basil opened the letter.

"Lord have mercy upon us! He's of age now, and he's agoin' to put the screws to us for the rent o' this here plantation just for spite!" cried the poor old lady, sinking down upon the chair where Helen leaned, and throwing her checked apron over her face, as was her wont when she was going to weep.

"Do *you* think that is it, Helen?" asked Basil.

"No," said Helen, paler than ever.

"Listen now! how vindictive he is, mother," said Basil.

"I wouldn't a believed it of him!" exclaimed the old lady, sobbing.

"Hear, then!" said Blaise, reading:

HOTEL D'A——, RUE DE V——, PARIS.

My dear old school-mate:

Will you receive the congratulations of a rejected suitor, forgetting that he was such! and remembering only that he always has been and ever will be your own and Theodora's warm well-wisher? And as a testimonial of his earnest regard, will you accept the accompanying deed for the farm, your own patrimony, that, had your present correspondent been of legal age to convey it, would long since have been restored to you? In the autumn I shall go to the "Orient" —but my address for some months to come will be at Paris, where I shall be very happy to receive letters from you and Theodora. Vivia joins me in cordial respect to your excellent grandmother and her family. We have both, as you see, written to Theodora.

Your old classmate and ever friend,

AUSTIN.

"There! that is Austin's revenge! And here is the deed!" exclaimed Basil.

"The Lord forgive me my harsh thoughts!" ejaculated the old lady, clasping her hands.

"Not one word—not one thought for me! I am bundled in with the 'family' along with Miss Nelly Parrot and the rest. And, after all, he is not coming back; but is purposing to travel in the East, out of my reach! this is beyond human power, and human endurance, as much! Oh, for some potent magician's wand to compel him back again! I have sold my soul on trust, but sooner or later I will have its price!" muttered Helen, behind her whitened lips, as she left the room.

"It was generous, it was noble in Austin; but I ought not to accept it," said Basil.

Miss Elizabeth, who, during the reading of the letter, had been engaging the attention of Miss Nelly Parrot at the other end of the room, now, at a signal from the old lady, came forward, and was informed of the affair. And then Basil went to seek Theodora.

She had, meanwhile, gained the seclusion of her own little room in the east gable end of the farm-house; had sunk into a seat near the only window and had examined the superscription of her two letters. The first one, directed in the handwriting of Austin Malmaison, was hastily, with its seal unbroken, laid aside. The second, from Vivia, was immediately opened and read. Theodora perceived, through the tone of this letter, that the untoward circumstances of her hapless marriage were intuitively known to Vivia, for, delicately as the lady dealt with this most difficult subject, the spirit of this communication, addressed to the recipient's deepest needs of thought and affection, was of that divine alchemic power that transmutes all suffering to benefit. It informed her that the humbler, Christ-like work of her mortal sorrow was the regeneration and immortal happiness of a now earth-bound spirit, to be delivered and uplifted by his pure love for her. And that the eternal good uses of this present life were of infinitely greater importance than its transient and illusory happiness. We have space only

for a few necessary extracts from that letter, that gave so much of comfort and strength to the fainting spirit, chilled heart, and clouded mind of Theodora.

"We had hoped," she wrote, "to have been at home long before this, dearest Theodora. But an affair of Mrs. Malmaison's, of which in time you will be informed, has still detained us in this city, where the news of your marriage has taken us very much by surprise. * * * * * * You cannot doubt how sincerely and earnestly both Austin and myself desire and pray for your happiness. But to be as happy as we wish you, our dear one, you must, while fulfilling your destiny on this planet, look to that spirit-world where the mistakes of this earth are corrected, the sorrows of this earth sanctified to good and joy, and the innocent gladness hereof crowned with immortality—that bright and blessed spirit-world we are all fast approaching. * * * No suffering is without its good uses, and no real evil can come to any human being except through their own co-operation. Faith in the Lord, hope in the future, love to your fellow creatures, are the antidotes for all forms of evil. Suffering is not an evil, inasmuch as it is not without benefit to ourselves or to others. We suffer not only by and through, but—the Lord be praised!—*for* our fellow-beings, also.—* * * * * * * I read your strange destiny thus—a spirit so heavily clay-bound, that he can lift his eyes no higher toward the heavens than the level of your lovely face, is committed to *your* spirit for deliverance and development. Strange, but on this planet often seen, reversal of woman's aspiring love!—But it is willed, or at least permitted, for 'the end is not yet.' 'Be thou faithful unto *death*,' saith our Lord, 'and I will give thee the crown of life.' 'Delight thyself also in the Lord, and He shall give thee (notice it, Theodora!) *the desire of thy heart.* Commit thy way unto the Lord, and trust also in Him, and (again notice it, Theodora!) *He shall bring it to pass*,'

singeth the inspired Psalmist. 'The crown of life,' 'the desire of thy heart,' the abundant fruition of every duty—immolated, earth-deferred affection and aspiration shall be yours, *are* yours, waiting in the safe keeping of the Lord. * * * * * * The pure love that has sprung for you from the depths of that strong, rugged heart, is the golden clue to lead his spirit heavenward. Hate not, lest you sink with him; love, that he may rise with you!— * * * Austin has written to you by this same mail. I have a prevision that you will lay his letter aside unread. Do not so. His letter is worthy of him and of you. Read it. And now forgive me, dear one, that I have, for your own sake, and for the first and last time, written freely of your present circumstances."

Pressing this letter closely to her heart, Theodora turned her head and wept a little. Then she put it in her bosom as some blessed relic and talisman against evil, and took up and opened Austin's letter. It was much shorter, but quite as considerate and affectionate as Vivia's had been.

"I write, now, dear Theodora, only to place our future relations in the clear light of truth and friendship. Forget the rash proposal you lately received from me, while I shall forget the rejection it was fated to meet. I am going to travel in the East. Vivia will probably be of the party. In the long years that must elapse before we meet, I entreat you to consider me, what in deed and in truth I am—your own and Basil's sincere and earnest friend and bro ther, and to be so generous as to permit me to prove that friendship by serving you both, as opportunity presents itself. * * * * Write or not, 'as the spirit moves you,' dear Theodora. I should be happy to get a letter from you; but if I do not, as in any case, I cannot but ascribe the best motives to your course." * * * *

There was but little more. She had folded the letter and was dreaming over it, when a gentle rap at the door caught

her attention. She knew the rap—no one ever rapped so gently as that except Basil.

"Come in," she said. And he entered.

"Oh! Dora, you have not finished your letters yet," he said, moving to retreat.

"Oh! yes I have. Remain. I have read Vivia's. And here is Austin's. Look at it if you please."

Basil took it, and with a fluctuating color glanced over it. Then, in silence he returned it to her. And next he took his own letter from his pocket, and sitting down before Theodora, read it aloud to her, and then displayed the deed of conveyance. The warm tears were streaming from Theodora's eyes. She made no other comment.

"I have never seen generosity like this," faltered Basil.

Still Theodora wept.

Suddenly Basil threw himself upon his knees before her, took her hands in his own, looked deprecatingly, prayerfully in her face, and entreated—

"Dora! dearest Dora! tell me—tell one who loves you more than his own life and soul—did you love *him?*"

Her tears now came with sobs that shook her whole frame.

"Did you, Dora?"

"Forbear that question, Basil," she sobbed.

"May God give me a short life!" cried Basil, dropping the hands he had held. The ejaculation was so earnest, so despairing, that its very passion drew Theodora out of herself. Lifting her white hands, she put them around that rough head bent near her, and drew it to her heart and bowed her own face over it, until her cheeks lay amid those disheveled locks—and with gentler flowing tears, she murmured,

"Basil—dear Basil, be patient as heretofore with me and with our fate—I love you with a sister's tenderest love—wait and trust in me—will you not?"

"I will—indeed I will!—it is a sort of religion to trust in you, Theodora," Basil replied, lifting his head and rising from his position.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE ABBE FRANCOIS.

Behold!
Your grief is but your sin in the rebound,
And cannot expiate for it!—*Elizabeth Barrett Browning.*

THE Malmaisons at Paris occupied the first floor of a first-class hotel, in a first-class street. Nothing less would suit the cold pride of "Madame." Her great wealth and high connection were a passport at once to the best American society in the city. A double motive brought Mrs. Malmaison to Paris—one-half of which the reader knows, and with the other half will soon become acquainted; this was, in a word, to purchase a title, in that most favorable mart in the world for a worldly woman to barter wealth for the hand and coronet of some desperately needy member of the *ancienne noblesse.* It was a paltry ambition, unworthy of that woman's cold, granite-like strength of will and understanding—or would have been under other circumstances. Ten years previous, in her first widowhood, she might with more propriety have aspired to that distinction. And yet those ten years had passed over the form and features of that calm, emotionless woman with no more effect than if she had been the alabaster image that she looked. Will it be believed?—at forty, in all except the *vivacity* of youth, which, by the way, she had never possessed, she looked as youthful as Vivia at half that age! An unsunned, dewy freshness was the most beautiful peculiarity of her albino

style. No newly-opened lily in the morning could look purer and fresher. She did not deny or seek to conceal her age—on the contrary, she took a cool pleasure in admitting her forty years, and smiled at the irrepressible surprise of men, and the excessive vexation of women of her own age, who looked so much older and yet wished to appear so much younger, and who, by her expose, must feel themselves set down at sixty for the lowest. She also rather paraded, in a calm way, her son, else no one would have guessed such a relationship between the tall, dark-eyed, grave-looking gentleman known as Mr. Malmaison, and her fair beauty; they could have about as easily have imagined him to be her father. So coolly certain was Ada of the untarnished lustre of her alabaster beauty, as seen in the delicate, elastic roundness of her perfect face and form, the transparent fairness of her complexion, and the tender clearness of her eyes, that it was in the insolence of power that she kept her age before the people. Truly she never said in so many words, "I am forty years old," but she would say something like this: "*Oui, Monseignor*, I have seen the statue, and agree with you that its whole effect is less *artistic* than *artificial*. At least such was its effect upon me, when I visited St. Petersburg, some twenty-five years ago." Or else, "*Non madame*, this is not my first visit to Paris. I was here in the troublous times when the allied powers occupied the city."

"*Grand Dieu! Cette dame est une Cagliostre feminin!*" would be the silent comment, when Ada said this, with the cool insolence of conscious beauty and power as who should say, "Let those regard time who yield to its influence. Years are nothing to me." "*Elle est une Ninon sans l'esprit,*" was sometimes said of this snowy beauty. The *parti* she had secured was the Vicomte De Lozere, a gentleman of uncertain age, but of distinguished presence, with a pedigree as long as his list of creditors. This was the

"affair" of Mrs. Malmaison, of which Vivia in her letter to Theodora, spoke.

In every great metropolis, of course, there are circles below circles, and there are coteries and cliques as ignorant of each other as if instead of dwelling in the same city, they lived at relative antipodes. What, for instance, had the poor abbes of the *Ecôle de la Compassion*, and the *Hôpital de la Charite*, to do with the habitues of the saloons of the Tuileries?

There was at this time a poor priest, at once abbe and maitre of the *Ecôle de la Charite*, who, not enjoying the privilege of *confesseur* to any *dame-du-qualite*, never by any chance entered the magic circle of the *elite*. He was a man of forty-five, with the bent frame and shrunken features and whitened hair of seventy. He went plodding on from day to day in his work of charity, unconscious that within a stone's cast of his post of duty, sojourned the two women, in whom, of all the race, save one other, he was the most interested. A seeming accident brought their mutual propinquity to his knowledge.

In the refined elegance of Mrs. Malmaison's establishment and surroundings, there was one very striking anomaly—this was in the person of her confidential attendant, Bridget Dougherty, or "Biddy Durty," as the truthful nomenclature of her dusky fellow-servants had dubbed her—Biddy Dougherty, with her unmitigated Connaught face, and her incurable brogue! Those intimate friends—if Ada Malmaison—a stranger to her daily associates and family circle, could be truly said to have intimate friends—who chanced to see this rude retainer about the person of the lady, gently lifted eyebrows and shoulders, and privately classed Biddy as *un esprit familier*, *une bête noire*, or, at the very least, a *caprice* of Madame. All this Biddy, with her Irish quickness, perceived, and—sure of her position—disregarded. Ada Malmaison never lost sight, or surveillance of her

strange Abigail. For some months past, however, it might have been noticed in the family that there was a cloud between the mistress and the maid—a something absolutely certain, yet difficult to define. Mrs. Malmaison was kind as ever—yet no kinder, for that cool lady was seldom moved by the moods of those around her. But Biddy had grown flighty, despondent, and shy of her mistress—who, perhaps, just now might have kept her under closer espionage than ever.

One night about this time Vivia was startled out of her sleep by a cry that sounded through the house. She sprang up at the sound, hurried on her dressing-gown, and hastened along the corridor in the direction of the cry that seemed to have come from Bridget Dougherty's room. The lights were out; but a taper from within the little chamber of Bridget gleamed through the keyhole, at the extremity of the corridor. Vivia hastened toward it, but before she reached the spot, either the key was turned straight in the lock, or the light was extinguished, for it suddenly disappeared, leaving all in darkness and in silence. She rapped loudly at the door, however, calling—

"Bridget! Bridget! was that you that screamed? Is any thing the matter?"

A soft, shuffling struggle—and a sudden cry—

"Och! Howly St. Pather! Miss Genevieve! Help!—" and the voice was suddenly stifled amid a soft, floundering sound—and once more broke out suddenly in the single, piercing cry of "*Murther!*" and then was again stilled under a subdued, desperate wrestle.

Vivia tried the door, but found it fast, then she flew to ring the alarm-bell, but swiftly as she passed, she was intercepted by the quiet opening of a door on the left hand of the corridor, and the appearance of Mrs. Malmaison, in her white-dressing-gown, and delicate lace cap, looking so

fresh, and calm, and cool, that her very presence acted at once as a sedative and refrigerative.

"Well, what is the matter, Vivia?"

"Good Heaven!—Bridget! She—"

"Has the nightmare, I suppose. She is rather subject to it—let us go and see."

And Mrs. Malmaison, bearing the perfumed taper, led the way to Bridget's little room. When they reached it, she requested Vivia to open the door. Vivia tried the lock, and to her astonishment it now readily yielded, the door swung open, and they entered. What a sight met their eyes!

Bridget Dougherty was sitting straight up in bed, her form rigid, her face blackened as by partial suffocation, her eyes glaring into vacancy.

But the instant the light flashed upon her sight, all this changed, she fell back upon her pillow, dragging the coverlet over her face, and with a prolonged howl, lay shuddering with an excess of terror.

"Bridget, what ails you?" inquired Mrs. Malmaison, coolly approaching the bedside.

Another wilder howl answered her.

"Are you ill, Bridget?" inquired Vivia.

At the sound of her voice the woman uncovered her head an instant, and seeing Vivia, and feeling, or seeming to feel reassured by her presence, opened the following battery upon her mistress:

"And are ye come again to murther me in me slape? Oh! and it's afraid, I'll be afther spaking iv yer ugly sacrets ye are! It's the mercy of St. Pather I'm strength enough for the likes of ye!" etc. etc.

Vivia looked on in surprise and dismay, while Mrs. Malmaison fixed her eyes steadily upon the eyes of the excited woman, and after a moment, without removing her gaze, laid

her hand upon her forehead, and after another moment, spoke, coolly, calmly, kindly—

"You have had an attack of nightmare, Bridget."

"Aye, was it an attack of nightmare?" began Bridget ironically, but without her former excitement. "Aye, was it? and a snowy nightmare it was with a white coat and a silvery mane, and—"

"Compose yourself, Bridget," said the lady, quietly stroking her forehead.

"—With a snowy skin and silvery hair, and—"

"Compose yourself, Bridget," monotonously repeated the lady, smoothing the woman's forehead.

"—Silvery curls, and—"

"Compose yourself, Bridget," still reiterated the lady, speaking in monotone and keeping her hand on the brow of the patient.

"Curls and—" That was the last. Bridget's voice sunk into inarticulate murmurs, and then ceased. A few more passages of that magic hand, and the woman lay in a seemingly deep sleep.

"She is over it now. Come, my dear, let us retire."

"Let me remain with her through the night, madame."

Mrs. Malmaison hesitated an instant, looked into Vivia's face, and then answered,

"As you please, my dear; but summon me if you grow tired of your watch," and taking up her taper, she passed out of the room.

Vivia took her seat by the bedside of the sleeper, who slept on so calmly through the short remaining hours of the night, that when, at last, the matin bell of the neighboring *Ecôle de la Charite* rang, Vivia thought she might with propriety leave her charge, and was preparing to do so, when the door opened quietly, and Mrs. Malmaison, like a spirit of peace, glided in.

"Well, my dear, you have seen by this time that there was no necessity for the sacrifice of your night's rest."

"Bridget has slept quietly enough certainly," said Vivia.

"Will you go now and sleep?"

"I will go now, and bathe and dress," said Vivia, giving a last glance at the couch of Bridget as she left the room.

From this time there seemed to be a strange spell upon the Irish woman. Good Catholic as she was, she never approached the church, while the gloom and sullenness of her mood, insignificant as she was, really infected the whole house; the servants of the establishment were overcast with its heavy shadow, while Gabrielle, the little daughter of the *Concièrge*, declared that "cette femme Irlandoise" put her in a grave, smothered her with clay! Only Mrs. Malmaison was unaffected, while a vague, silent but a deadly struggle seemed going on between the mistress and the confidential maid. It was about this time that Vivia's and Austin's attention was taken up with the news of Theodora's marriage, communicated in a letter from the Abbess of St. Genevieve, and with the new arrangements that step seemed to render expedient, and also with the still stranger intelligence conveyed by Mrs. Malmaison of her own approaching nuptials with the Vicomte De Lozere. The time appointed for this wedding was drawing very near; but meanwhile the "*bête noir*" of the household was growing blacker and sullener every day.

One morning when Mrs. Malmaison was gone upon a shopping expedition, and Austin had strolled out somewhere, Vivia was in her own room, engaged in writing to Theodora, when a groan from a neighboring chamber fell on her ear—a second and a third succeeded, and then she recognized the voice of Bridget Dougherty, and hastened to her assistance.

The room at the extremity of the corridor was open, and upon the bed lay Bridget, writhing.

"What is the matter?" asked Vivia, drawing near in compassion.

"Och, thin, honey, it's *kilt* I am, I'm thinking"— here a paroxysm of pain took her, and she spoke no more for a moment, but remained wrestling in silence with the agony, while Vivia flew to the bell, and rang for a servant to send for a physician. Going back to the bed, she found the woman half fainting from her recent struggle. While bathing her face with water she inquired—

"Where is your pain, Bridget?"

"Och, honey, it's poisoned I am, I'm dead, sure, it's poisoned I am! Oh! howly St. Pather! it's a judgment on meself—so it is!"

Just at this moment the door opened, and a servant appeared in answer to the bell.

"This woman is very ill—hasten instantly, and bring the nearest physician, the very first one you can find," exclaimed Vivia.

"*Le bon Abbe de l'Ecole de la Charite est aussi un medecin, Mademoiselle.*"

"Go, bring him at once then," replied Vivia, as she turned her attention again to Bridget, while the lacquey went to do her bidding. The woman was quiet in an interval of ease, and to Vivia's renewed inquiries, she replied,

"Och! honey, meself is subject to faintness, and I do take for it a gill of casthor ile in a toombler iv brandy, and that same doos me a wurruld of good. But the Lord have a hand in me! and the Vargin betwane me and hurrum, I was tuk this morning with a murthering pain in me chist and a cowld faver, wid a burning in me head, as if it would fly to pieces, and meself did open the misthresses beaufet, and take a sup o' suthing, and—och! howly saints, I'm burning up in my insides!" cried Bridget, suddenly breaking off, and writhing with a return of torture. "It was p'ison! I'm sure it was p'ison, and a thrap laid for meself! Och! blis-

sid angels! it's all over wid me! an it's not a doctor, but a praste I'm wanting," cried the poor creature in the intervals of her paroxysm.

Vivia sought by every means at hand to relieve her sufferings.

"You shall have both, Bridget. The man I have summoned is both priest and physician," said Vivia soothingly.

The words had scarcely left her lips before the door opened, and the lacquey announced—

"L'Abbe Francois," and Vivia, turning with surprise and joy, exclaimed, smiling,

"Father Francis!"

"My dear child! my dear Vivia! you here! Why, how is this?" exclaimed the Abbe, advancing and taking her by both hands.

Before Vivia could reply to his question, a cry from the sick woman, who was now in strong convulsions, arrested their attention, and both hastened to the bedside. Vivia in hurried accents recounted what she had heard of the history of the woman's seizure, and added that she feared poison had been swallowed by mistake.

"Och, it was a thrap! it was a thrap! it was put there for me," cried Bridget, in the midst of her suffering.

"Hush, hush, my daughter, you must not say that!" said Father Francis, as he proceeded to examine his patient, whose convulsions returning with accelerated violence, greatly alarmed the spectators. Father Francis wrote a rapid prescription and dispatched it by the footman, who had remained in attendance in the corridor.

"She is laboring under the effects of strychnia," he whispered, as he passed the pale and awe-struck Vivia. The spasms now returned after shorter intervals and with greater violence. And even in the intermissions so acute was the nervous sensibility that a light touch, or the *fear* of being touched, was enough to throw the patient into violent con-

vulsions, at the same time that her mental faculties were not only undiminished, but increased in clearness and strength. Even in the midst of the frightful spasms that contorted her whole frame, her eyes remained clear and pure—only sparkling and flashing like stars.

"Father Francis, dear," she said in her intervals of ease; "you see I know ye and it's yourself I want to spake to! Och! it's all over wid me! nought ye can do will relave me body. But ye'll let me relave me conscience—" a terrible paroxysm arrested her words, and while she was still struggling, the servant arrived from the druggist's with medicines and a sponge. Father Francis hastily seized one of the vials, poured a quantity of chloric-ether from it upon the sponge and gave it to Vivia, with directions to hold it to the sufferer's nostrils. This was difficult—for the approach of any hand fearfully augmented the violence of the spasms.

"Do not be afraid, indeed I will not touch you, Bridget, only let me hold the sponge near enough for you to inhale the ether—it will surely relieve you, try to snuff it up," said Vivia, gently. The poor creature did as she was bidden, and the relaxing influence of the subtle element soon modified her sufferings, while Father Francis administered a dose of the extract of Indian hemp, the only antidote to strychnia then known.

"Ah! it's no use at all, at all, Father dear! I'm going! I know it, for when I'm not struggling, sure I'm *sinking* like a drowning man in the say!"

And in truth no one could look at her and doubt for a moment the speedy approach of death. A paroxysm more frightful than any that had preceded it now convulsed and blackened her form. This lasted some time, and when it was over, her body remained in the twisted posture in which the last awful spasm had left it; and her features were crushed in and darkened over with the shadow of approach-

ing dissolution. Father Francis bent over, fearing that she had already breathed her last.

"She is still living, but can nothing be done to restore her?" asked Vivia, in extreme anxiety.

"No power on earth can save her!" exclaimed the priest. Then, sinking on his knees at the bedside, he addressed the dying woman. "Bridget, my poor daughter! if there is any thing you would like to say or do, any last sacrament of confession or communion, it were best done now, my poor child."

"Eh! so soon, and me not ready!" exclaimed the terrified woman, with a cry of anguish, as she started up and then fell back in another convulsion that threatened to take her life. "I knew it though! I knew it—only it is so dreadful to hear you say it," she murmured, as the paroxysm once more passed off.

"My poor daughter, you go to a merciful Judge. But, before you depart, use the few moments that you have left in preparing to meet His face. Genevieve, my dear, leave me alone with my penitent."

"No! no!—no! no. What I have to say must be said before witnesses! Oh! blissid saints be between me and death till I tell it! Sure its laid on me conscience long!" She ceased a moment, while Father Francis and Vivia drew near to catch the low tones of her failing voice. "Stoop down—listen! Eustatia Malmaison—"

"Ha! *Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed Father Francis, bending down, "what of her?"

"Twenty-one years ago she gave birth to a living son, at Mount Storm, in Maryland."

Again the voice died away in exhaustion, while the priest, with strained eyes and blanched and breathless lips bent over to catch her faintest tones.

"The birth of that child was concealed—"

"But the mother! the mother?" cried the priest, in an agony of anxiety, lest that voice should fail too soon."

"She *disappeared*—and I—that is all I know of her!"

"And the child—"

"Is Austin Malmaison!"

"*Grand Dieu!*" cried Father Francis, dropping his convulsed face into the palms of his hands. "Go on—go on—" he said at length, without lifting his head.

"Och, then! there's not much more to tell! *I* helped to conceal the real birth of Austin, and to palm him off on the old man as the son of Mrs. Ada Malmaison."

"But why? why was this double fraud perpetrated?"

"Oh! thin! don't ye know? To get all the old man's money, which she couldn't have got unless she had had a child, which she couldn't hope for, you'll know—because demons never can be mothers."

Here the voice died quite away, and Father Francis had to bend his ear to within an inch of the sinking woman's lips, before he could catch the answer to his next question.

"The real mother! Eustacia! tell me what you know of her!"

"The blissid St. Pather witness, I know nothing more than I have told yees—I wasn't in *that* sacret—ask *her*—"

These were the last intelligible words that Bridget spoke. Muttering something about "a trap," and "poison," and "misthress's beaufet," her voice sunk into inarticulate babbling, and then into silence. She was sinking fast. Father Francis stretching his hands over her, pronounced the formula of absolution and benediction. Vivia held the crucifix to the congealing lips, too lifeless to receive the blessed sign with a kiss, while Father Francis clasped his venerable hands, and lifted up his voice in prayer for a parting soul. It was soon over.

"She is gone," sighed Vivia, laying the crucifix upon the

lifeless bosom; "shall I summon the women of the household, Father?"

"No, my child! no, Vivia! Go you and watch for the return of madame! Tell her nothing of this affair, but only that the *Maitre de l'Ecole de la Charite* would like to see her in this room."

Vivia hesitated.

"My Father! must I do this thing?"

"No, no, Vivia, if you dislike the office! send the servant who was here just now, to me, and go you to your own apartment, and be quiet until you hear from me. There is much to be talked over between us, my child."

"Yes! very much, Father!" said Vivia, still hesitating, as if she fain would have remained.

"But this is not the place, my child. Go now and do as I have directed you."

Vivia obeyed, and left the room. Seeing Victor in the corridor, she sent him to Father Francis. And when she passed to her own chamber, took out of her bureau a miniature of Mother Agatha, painted by Theodora, and also the last letter of the Abbess.

"I am sure—I am sure she is his long-lost wife; but at any event, the miniature will prove the question. If she is the lost Eustacia, he will know the miniature and the handwriting. What a fearful mystery of iniquity has that poor women pointed out!" mournfully thought Vivia, as she sat gazing upon the most sorrowful face that ever artist transferred to the ivory. "Torn asunder in early youth; kept separated by a tissue of falsehood—and now in their middle age—he at the altar, she in the Convent! Can this husband and wife ever meet?"

While Vivia's soul was absorbed in these questions, Father Francis watched by the dead body in the little room at the end of the corridor, and Victor, the footman, waited

at the head of the grand staircase to intercept Mrs. Malmaison.

Very differently had that lady spent the morning—among milliners, mantua-makers, jewelers, and fancy-goods dealers; and having left extravagant orders with all, she had turned her horses' heads from the shops, and drove around to call or leave cards upon several ladies of her circle.

It was late in the afternoon when she returned. As the carriage rolled through the *porte cochère*, and entered the court-yard within, the lady noticed an unusual but suppressed excitement among the loitering lacqueys of the establishment. She alighted from the carriage, entered, and ascended the grand staircase, near the head of which she found Victor waiting. But this official, instead of, as in duty bound, walking before his mistress, to open doors, stood in her way, bowing.

"*Eh bien! que'st?*" inquired the lady.

"*Monsieur l'Abbé de l'Ecôle de la Charité attendent, madame.*"

"*Ou, donc, est Monsieur l'Abbé?*"

"*En le petite chambre de l'Irlandaise.*"

"*Allez-vous, donc!*" said the lady, coolly.

The servant bowed and led the way to the extremity of the corridor, where he opened the door, announced Madame Malmaison, and retired. The lady entered the room, not recognizing in the darkened light either the dead body extended upon the bed, or the form of the gray, bowed, old man watching beside it.

"You wish to see me, mon pere," she said, calmly and silently.

"Oui, madame! *Voila!*" exclaimed the priest, suddenly rising and taking her hand, and drawing her to the bedside, while he stripped off the covering, revealing the face of the dead.

"Francis Laglorieux! you here? You have changed

so, that I did not recognize you," said Mrs. Malmaison, calmly.

"*Voila!*" exclaimed the priest, sternly, pointing to the face of the dead.

"What is the matter with Bridget?"

"*Elle est* MORTE—*et par vous!*"

"*Abbé!*" exclaimed the lady, in a tone of calm rebuke.

"Madame! you have wonderful self-command—let it avail you while I speak!" said the priest, in the same deep, stern voice, as he compelled this impassible woman to take the chair in front of him, and listen while he addressed her.

"Madame, you are a very skillful, and hitherto you have been a very successful woman, principally through favor of your protector, Satan! But know you that the Prince of Darkness, like other great potentates, in time grows weary of his favorites, and leaves them to their own weak devices? —so has Satan deserted *you*, madame! In no other way can I account for the manifest weakness of your late conduct."

"Sir, will you please to come nearer to the point? Your language—to say nothing of its discourtesy, which I am willing to excuse—is exceedingly vague!"

"Then it shall be as pointed as you please, madame. There are but a few words I have to say to you, and there is but one demand I have to make of you. I am about to speak the former and require the latter! All else I leave to Monsieur le Commissaire de Police."

"Go on, sir, in heaven's name!"

"Attend, then—twenty-one years since—"

"In truth, sir, you go back very far! almost beyond the memory of the oldest inhabitant," sneered the lady.

Without noticing the interruption, the priest continued—

"I espoused in your presence Eustacia Malmaison. Called away imperatively from the neighborhood, I left her in your care. That was the last I ever saw of my bride.

You wrote to me that *she* had brought dishonor on her house and fled. *I* sought her, by the false cue you had given me, through the world! How fruitlessly, you know! After years had passed, heart-broken and despairing, I entered the church."

"*Il est une histoire ancienne,*" said the lady.

"*Oui! mais avec une consequence moderne et une denouement inevitable! Voila la mort!* She was your accomplice! but her conscience troubled her. She sought to relieve her soul by the sacrament of confession; but her spiritual director ordered her to put away her sin—in other words, no longer to hide, but to disclose the falsehood of which she was the abettor before he could give her absolution. She could not bring herself to do this! shame and a certain strange affection for you, and perhaps fear of you, kept her silent under the goadings of her conscience. But she was a good Catholic, and could not live excommunicated by her Church. As year by year passed—as festival after festival of the Church was celebrated, of which she was forbidden to participate, the weight of her sin grew heavier and still heavier. You saw the burden on her heart, the struggle in her mind; and, with your marvelous power, for a long time you controlled the operations of that mind. But at last the conscience of one poor humble and ignorant woman grew to be a power that even *you* could not hold in perpetual abeyance! You saw it—you knew it! It seemed necessary to your safety that this woman's tongue should be stilled. Well, you did not dare to poniard her in sleep—but you knew a certain weakness to which she was subject. You left a temptation in her way, and when the habit had become established—listen, madame!—you put a deadly poison in your decanter of Cognac. The victim fell into the trap! Enough! So far the plot was arranged with consummate skill, so as not to put your *own* life in danger! *Mais voila!* did not Satan desert you? How else should

you have failed to foresee that the hour of death for *her* would be the hour of disclosure of the past, and of ruin for you? Finding herself ill unto death, she made a last communication—not under the *seal* of sacramental confession, but before two witnesses, to establish her words. Shall I disclose to you the subject of her confession, madame?

"*L'est n'importe!* she was probably delirious!" said the lady, calmly.

"Ada Malmaison! demon that you now know that *I* know you are—your demonology will not serve you further! While there is yet time to do one voluntary good act of restitution in your life, tell me—where is Eustacia?"

"Do you suppose that you will learn from me? I know nothing of the poor woman you name. You have given your speech more license, sir, than even your holy habit warrants. You see how little it has moved me. Yet, but in respect for that holy habit, I had not heard you so long. Now, reverend sir, will you have the good feeling to withdraw, and permit the attendance of women, to prepare this dead for burial?"

"Madame, I withdraw. Yet there will probably be *other visitors* to this chamber, ere your women are permitted to disturb this death-bed. Madame's *business* has been conducted with a tact and policy that will save her life, but not that for which she *lives*—that which is dearer than life—*honor*—position! This heinous affair cannot pass without investigation, which certainly will not develope any thing to Madame Malmaison's credit. Ha! had you, Satan forsaken, self-blinded, lost sight of that necessity?" asked the priest, upon perceiving just the slightest change of color in that marble face; it was not a turning paler—for more colorless than usual she could not be;—but it was as though the faintest shade of gray had overspread the alabaster fairness of her skin, and there was a scarcely perceptible tremor in her voice, as she said—

"Once more! will you do me the favor of retiring, Monsieur l'Abbe?"

"Once more! will *you* do *me* the favor of informing me what has become of Eustacia Laglorieuse?"

"No, sir," answered Mrs. Malmaison, coolly and firmly, for she had quickly recovered her self-command.

"*Eh bien, Madame!*" I leave you to reconsider that reply," said the priest, as he withdrew from the room of death.

"Victor, show me into some private sitting-room, and then go and inform Mademoiselle Laglorieuse that I await her," were the Abbe's directions to the servant he found still lingering in the corridor.

Victor opened the door of *un joli petit apartement* on the left, where Vivia soon joined her "spiritual father." Nearly related as they were—uncle and niece, guardian and ward, teacher and pupil, almost father and child, as they had been for the first half of Vivia's short life; long as they had been separated; much as they loved each other; their reunion was without any other expression of affection than the tender meeting of their eyes, and the loving tones of their voices. When she came in, he took her hand and stood holding it for a moment and looking upon her. Who is insensible to beauty? Not even this gray, bent, prematurely old and broken-hearted priest; and his eyes rested in pride and admiration upon the graceful head, with its falling ringlets of rich, resplendent, auburn hair, the snowy polished forehead, the perfect arch of the brows, the long fall of the silky lashes, shading beauteous eyes of purplish blue, the rich damask bloom on cheeks and lips, and the finely developed, though lithe and graceful form. "How beautiful," said the eyes and heart of the man.

"You are like your mother, my child," said the calm lips of the priest.

"My mother," repeated Vivia; life-long regret, tender-

ness, wonder, all were expressed in the tone in which those two words were uttered.

"We have both changed much since we parted, my child. You have grown up with womanhood. I have fallen into age and decrepitude. I should have known you any where by your likeness to your mother, even had not Victor prepared me to expect to see you, by the information that this floor was occupied by Madame Malmaison. But, changed as I am, how did you know me, my child?"

"Ah! as if any superficial change could vail you from me! Your eyes and voice, *mon pêre*, remain unchanged," said Vivia, tenderly, as she sank into a chair, and pointed out another to the weary man.

"Not forgotten, my child, yet feebly remembered, Vivia! for my letters for the last two years have remained unanswered!" said the priest in gentle reproach.

"What do you say, my father! Your letters unanswered! I wrote to you regularly until letter after letter of mine having failed to elicit a reply, I thought that you had left Paris, and then I wrote to your Provincial to inquire, but failed also in obtaining an answer from him. Then not knowing where to address you, having lost trace of you, I waited patiently for you to recollect and write to me!" exclaimed Vivia, in irrepressible wonder.

"*Mon Dieu! Toujours cette femme de diable!*" ejaculated the priest in astonishment and indignation.

"*Could* she have intercepted the letters? *Would* she have done so?"

"Would she have hesitated to do *any thing* that should seem to serve her interests? You heard poor Bridget's communication; what think you of it?"

"A portion of it—that which related to Austin's parentage, did not surprise me. In the course of my short life, certain impressions received, I scarcely know how, or when, slight indices, pointed out to me the true parentage (on one

side at least) of Austin. The confession of poor Bridget only confirmed what I before suspected, and added some missing links to the chain of evidence."

"Slight indices, you said, had pointed out to you the true parentage of Austin, *on one side at least.* Which side was that?" asked the Abbe, with intense interest.

"His mother's," replied Vivia, in a low voice.

She held in her hand a thin packet of letters, and a small morocco case; opening the latter, she put it in the hands of the priest, inquiring,

"Father! do you recognize that face?"

It was the miniature likeness of Mother Agatha in her Abbess dress. A rush of emotion flushed, empurpled the face of the Abbe, which as suddenly receding, left him white, and almost feeble as the dying.

"*Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu! c'est Eustacie! ou donc est elle!*" he cried in piercing tones.

"She is at the Convent of St. Genevieve, in Maryland, where I was educated. She was the Abbess who sheltered me the first night of my arrival, from the storm, and in whose charge I was afterward left for education. She was the Abbess of whose goodness and whose sorrow I wrote to you so often, and with whom I continued to live until reclaimed by Mrs. Malmaison—"

"*L'est femme de diable encore! Toujours c'est femme de diable!*" interrupted the priest.

While these explanations were passing between Vivia and the Abbe, Mrs. Malmaison was very differently engaged. Having given particular instructions respecting the proper arrangement of the remains of her unfortunate servant, this lady passed serenely on to her dressing-room, made a new toilet, and then, calm, fair, fragrant, and fresh as any morning dew-cooled lily entered her *salon,* to receive a party of distinguished visitors, among whom was her *fiance,* the Vicomte De Lozerre, with his sisters. It was here, in her

pride of place, surrounded by her court, as it were, that this queen of beauty and of sin was attended by certain official visitors, who were not of the invited guests. It was about an hour after her entrance, and while her company were engaged in a lively and desultory conversation, that the door was thrown open by a servant in attendance, who announced—

"*Monsieur le Sergent de Police, pour madame.*"

"*Le traitre!*" muttered that lady, between her fair lips, as she glanced at Victor; when to the consternation of the assembled guests, a *Sergent de Police*, attended by a subordinate officer, entered, advanced directly up to the lady of the establishment, and bowing very deeply, inquired,

"*Madame Malmaison, n'est ce pas?*"

"*Oui, Monsieur,*" replied that lady, with cool, questioning *hauteur*.

"*Pardon, madame, mais Monsieur le Commissaire* desires the honor of madame's presence at the *cour de police,*" said the officer, very politely, or very ironically, and serving the warrant with the air of a man presenting a card of invitation.

The same slight gray shadow fell for an instant on the lady's face, and vanished, as she answered, quietly,

"*Tres bien.* Be good enough to ring the bell and order my carriage while I prepare myself."

"*Qu'est se que?*" inquired the Viscomte, coming forward, with consternation on his countenance.

"*C'est rien—au revoir, Monsieur!*" replied Ada, smiling in undisturbed serenity, as she courtesied, and gracefully and majestically passed off through the door leading to her boudoir and bed chamber.

"*Pardonnez moi, Madame, si vous plait*—leave the doors of communication open," said the *sergent de police*, following and keeping her in sight.

Haughtily the lady nodded compliance. Only a small and

elegantly appointed boudoir intervened between the *salon* and the bedroom at the extremity of this suite of apartments; and, therefore, as both doors were left open, not only the police-officers, but the whole company in the *salon*, had a full view of those rooms and Mrs. Malmaison's proceedings. There was an elegant toilet table at the further end of the furthest room, and in the direct line of vision from the doors. To this table Ada Malmaison slowly advanced, and stood before the mirror, with her back toward the spectators, and seemed engaged in arranging or toying with the light tresses of her hair. Then she took up and put down in succession several of those elegant little trifles with which her toilet stand was adorned. Finally she turned half-around, threw up both white arms, and fell forward prostrate on the floor.

With a simultaneous exclamation the visitors rushed into the chamber. The sergeant of police, who was nearest and first on the fatal spot, raised the wretched woman from the floor. Her head and arms fell back, hanging helplessly. She was already dead; and the tiny crystal vial that fell empty from her relaxed fingers, and around which still lingered the faint sweet odor of bitter almonds, spoke the rest.

Enough—too many painful scenes have been described. Permit me to pass lightly over those that ensue. As the alarm spread, all the household flocked to the chamber of the catastrophe. Of the guests of the *salon*, the greater portion hurried away, perhaps to escape from assisting at the impending *enquete* within—perhaps also to spread the terrible intelligence without; while the few remained probably from the mixed motives of curiosity to witness what should follow and of conscious obligation to give in their own testimony. It was in the midst of the confusion incident upon the tragedy that Austin, returning from his ride to Versailles, found his home in possession of the police and

crowd. Vivia, pale with grief and horrors, and supported on the arm of the Abbe Laglorieux was by order of the coroner present at the *enquete*. It was from the servants of the hall that Austin hastily gathered the knowledge of what had occurred. But little affection had ever existed between Austin and his *soi disant* mother, yet the intelligence of her awful fate overwhelmed him with affliction. "Suicide by prussic acid" was the verdict rendered after the *enquete*.

Pass we hastily over the days that followed—the doubly sorrowful funeral of the self-killed—the city talk, the newspaper paragraphs—the comments pro and con of the most excitable and most forgetful people in the world. For a day nothing else was spoken of but this event—in a week it was totally forgotten.

After the horror of the suicide's unblessed funeral was over, there came a quiet day when Vivia presented Austin to the Abbe Laglorieux, and left them together to come to a mutual understanding. Various circumstances and events in the life of this young man, slight themselves, yet important in their suggestions, had in some measure prepared him to hear that he was the son by *adoption only* of the late unhappy woman whom he had so long addressed by the sacred name of mother. When the Abbe related the story of his youthful love and imprudent marriage, and subsequent loss of his bride, followed by his own entrance into the priesthood; and finally ended by disclosing the very recent discovery of his long lost wife in the Abbess of St. Genevieve, and of his unknown son in Austin—the latter was not precisely ready to "rush into his father's arms"—but sat pale, silent, thoughtful, incredulous, hesitating even with a comment, still looking upon, still feeling toward the venerable man before him as toward a stranger.

But when the Abbe again spoke of his mother—his *true* mother—the image of that beautiful pale nun whom he had once seen dispensing alms at the convent gate, and whose

dark, mournful eyes, and deep melodious voice had so strangely and sweetly thrilled his nerves and heart, Austin hastily interrupted the Abbe's speech by exclaiming—

"We must go to her, sir! We must go to her at once! I mean that Vivia and myself must do so—and—is it not possible that you can get leave to accompany us, *mon pere?*"

"Yes, Austin, I can and will. My Provincial will absolve and dismiss me, Austin. I attend you of course."

And still Austin did not offer himself to his father's embrace. Indeed he seemed rather reserved toward that aged man, and it was clear that if any affection or friendship was to grow up between those two it must germinate gradually from the deep-soiled esteem of long association and mutual knowledge.

Aud so the eastern tour was for the present delayed, and our friends made arrangements for returning with all possible expedition to their own country.

CHAPTER XXIX.

FAMILY SECRETS.

Ay, fondly, fervently, these two had loved,
Had mingled minds in love's own perfect trust,
Had watched bright sunsets, dreamt of distant years,
And thus they met! Oh, meeting sad and strange!
But are not *meetings*, in this world of change,
Sadder than *partings*, oft? And thus they met!
Oh, since their youth's last passionate farewell,
How changed in all but love!—the true, the strong,
Joining in death whom life had parted long!—*Felicia Hemans*

Ay, "sadder than partings," oft are meetings in this world of ours. Well is it, if external change be the worst that has passed over us in the meanwhile; well, if the blight of youth and beauty and expectation be the worst blight;

well if the bent form, wasted flesh, dimmed eye, and whitened hair, the honest record of many years, be the worst marks set upon the countenance; well if the hard and sharp, or sensual or sinister expression there does not betray the world-ossified, flesh-debased, or devil-perverted nature; *very* well if, in all losses, spiritual life be not lost!

The meeting of these two long-severed friends of whom I am about to tell you, was not of this mournful nature. Sorrowful enough, indeed, it was, with the blight of all youthful hopes and aspirations—the irreparable losses of all past time—for what could restore their more than twenty years of wasted life?—but without bitter regret for themselves or each other. The worst fault of their youth had been only haste, imprudence, and thoughtless disobedience, in one single instance, to parental authority—a fault resulting in, and, as they in their fond faith believed, *expiated* by a lifetime of patient suffering and faithful devotion to the duties they had respectively assumed. And so their meeting, with all its earthly mournfulness, was still cheerful with heavenly hopes. They met in age, each bound by irrevocable vows that must keep them sacred from the bitter mockery of this late earth-union; he vowed to the altar, to the service of God for humanity; she to the life of mercy, to the service of humanity for God. Ah, they met to reveal themselves each to the other, to breathe again vows of undying affection and fidelity; and then—to part forever?—no! but to adjourn their reunion from time to eternity—from earth to heaven! Oh blessed hope! oh, soundless depths of joy to know long-suffering love, not lost, but sanctified, redeemed, immortalized, laid up—the most precious crowning blessing among the "treasures in heaven!"

I know a beautiful and gifted girl who gave her heart's first love to her spiritual adviser—a sinless, a heavenly love, yet must it be confessed as a sin.—And he, the young priest, loved his charge not less strongly or less purely. But he

kept that all-precious, heavenly fire pure from every form of evil. He did not seek a dispensation from his vows—he would not so trifle with faith pledged to God, not to man; he had one interview with his beloved—he set her soul on fire with a celestial hope, adjourned their union from earth to heaven, and offered her up to the Mission of Mercy. And she, with a loving reverence past imagination, bowed acceptance of that doom. The Lord gave her a short and glorious though hidden life—a life whose mysterious riches and joys were all of the spirit—a laborious life among the poor, the sick, the sinful, and the prisoners. A refined, delicate, fastidious girl, she went on her errands of love amid sights and sounds and scenes in which every spiritual and material sense was pained—where the external squalor, filth, and disease were but the faintest indication of the inner foulness and decay. She went, in fine, where only such spirits can go without bringing away the smallest speck of soil upon their white garments. His labors were in another field, though among the same forsaken class. How much good their devoted charity wrought has never been computed here. They have both gone hence. And I love to think of them, united in heaven. This is a slight digression, and only made to illustrate the strong realizing faith, the confident anticipation with which some spirits look to heaven for the sure and bright fulfillment of every duty-sacrificed, earth-deferred, pure hope and aspiration.

Let there be no sorrowful regret for such as these; but for those only whose loves, through evil, are lost for time and for eternity. Eustacia, Madame Laglorieux, Mother Agatha, whichever you may please to call her, for all these names was the mourning Abbess of St. Genevieve Convent justly entitled—had been prepared as well as it was possible to prepare such a woman, for such a meeting. First of all Vivia had written to her, informing her of the sudden death of Mrs. Malmaison, and of the casual meeting with the Abbe

Francois Laglorieux. Now it has been seen that very little love existed between Ada and the Abbess. And the intelligence of the catastrophe that ended the sinful life of the former, shocked, without grieving the latter. But that Vivia had met Francois was the great absorbing point of interest. The latter gave no further details—there was nothing more than these two single facts, one of which was enough to afford speculation for the fortnight that intervened before the reception of a second letter advising Mother Agatha of the change in their plans of travel, and of their speedy return home in the company of Father Francis. Half ready as she was for this news it was nevertheless a shock of joy so thrilling, and exciting heart and soul, that neither reading, prayer nor meditation could for days compose them. And then came a letter from Abbe Francois. What a letter! What an outpouring of the long pent fountains of love and passionate grief. "Oh! my long lost, my ever mourned—my dearest—my only one!" he wrote—"I—whom sorrow could never utterly break down—can now scarcely bear up under the joy of the revelation that has been made to me! To know you living—spiritually living, soul and body living, wise, good, and useful, not dead, not lost to Heaven or to me—but saved, redeemed, treasured, and mine as I am thine to all eternity. Ah! mine own! I who have sinfully despaired and prayed for death for so many long years, now dread even the familiar sea least its waves should engulf me ere I see your face again. For though I surely know that we are one forever and forever, yet would I meet thee, my Eustacia, yet once more face to face in this scene of our love and sorrow—yet once more to recall, to explain, and then forever to bury and forget the systematic falsehood that hid your fair soul from my vision, and kept us apart and unknown to each other for so many years. Our Austin! he has his mother's heart of fire and soul of light."

"Mine? ah! no, not mine," mused the Abbess at this

point of the letter, "from me, indeed, perhaps the burning heart, alas!—but not from me the bright and radiant soul!"

Emotions too deep for tears, shook her whole being. Francois was coming, and life and the world, aye, and the aspects of eternity seemed all changed in that prospect. He was coming—he had come! A letter from New York preceded his party by a few hours, announcing their arrival. Very careful were they that no surprise should try the strength of the already shaken woman.

It was a warm, refulgent day in summer, when the Abbess, advised of their intended approach, sat waiting them. Waiting? Oh! could any surprise have been more trying than that excited vigilance and continued suspense? Happily it did not last long. As soon as she could reasonably have expected the carriage, it rolled into the court-yard.

Vivia alone alighted and came into the room where the Abbess stood incapable of speech or of motion.

Blooming and smiling with joy the bright visitant embraced her pale and trembling friend, and whispering,

"He is here," gently seated her in the nearest chair, and went out and quickly returned ushering in Francois Laglorieux, and then retired, leaving the long-severed pair alone.

That meeting! that strange meeting of mingled joy and sorrow! who shall describe it?—could either of the parties most concerned have given any clear account of it? A priest and nun—albeit many years anterior to their assumption of religious and conventual habits—a wedded pair—might not now meet as lovers or even as ordinary friends—the very clasping of the hands was forbidden by the vows that each had rashly taken. She arose to welcome him; but could only point out a chair, thus mutely inviting him to take it, before she sank back into her own seat. He drew the indicated seat near her own and sat down. Notwithstanding all careful preparation both were excessively agitated, and at first quite incapable of conversation. They

talked incoherently; questioned or replied at random; commenced sentences and stopped abruptly; spoke in ejaculations—and broke off to gaze—each upon the other's altered brow in a sorrowful dismay. This, at first, and then the deeply troubled souls grew gradually quiet, the course of thought and affection smoother and clearer, and finally they calmly gathered up the scattered links in their broken chain of history, and put them together for a better understanding of the past.

When all was explained, Monsieur Laglorieux said,

"The longer I have lived—the more I have learned—the deeper I am impressed with the truth that no *real* evil can happen to us, except with our own consent and through our own co-operation. We were youthful and below all, we were faulty, and therefore were we given over to believe a lie! Had we been good, dear Eustacia, had we possessed *faith* in each other, this great evil could not have approached. Nay! had but *one* of us had faith in the other, that single faith would have been mighty enough to have defeated the machinations of all the powers of darkness. Had you possessed faith enough in me to have withstood the mighty force of calumny, and even the deceptive evidence of your own senses, for a little while, and had I possessed the like faith in you, no power under Divine Providence could have severed us. But we had already, in one instance, in that of our marriage, shown ourselves passionate, self-willed and disobedient, and we were prepared to believe further evil of each other, when the charge came, supported by such strong evidence. Neither of us, alas! had a saving faith in the other! Had we had, this evil could not have conquered us. Ay! no evil can overcome us except with our own consent!"

The Abbe paused, and after a brief silence resumed:

"Yet, let us thank the Power that bringeth good out of evil, that our sorrow has been sanctified to our soul's eternal welfare, and to the good uses of our fellow beings. In our

grief many have been made glad. Especially is this true of *your* portion, my Eustacia. Long have I heard—without suspecting her identity with my lost bride—of the wisdom, and goodness, and widely extended usefulness of St. Genevieve's Abbess! How the poor, the sick, the sinful, the sufferer of every kind and degree blessed her ministrations. Ay! how the sick have been restored by her prayers, and the case-hardened sinner subdued aud converted by her exhortations—how—"

"Oh! hush, hush! 'Not unto us, not unto us, oh Lord, but unto Thy Name be all the glory!'" exclaimed the Abbess, clasping her hands, and raising her dark eyes, now radiant with the light of holy enthusiasm.

"There is a mission of our order to be opened in this neighborhood—a seminary for the education of youth. Gray Rock, the old Garland property, has been purchased for the site. It is expected to be commenced just as soon as the interior of the old mansion can be fitted up. I suppose it will be ready for the reception of pupils by the first of September, the usual commencement of the autumnal scholastic term. They will probably make me one of the prefects of the new establishment. I shall remain in your neighborhood. How will that suit you, my friend?" inquired the Abbe, after a little while.

"Well! oh! very well! dost thou not know it?" exclaimed the lady, her pale face glowing from the depths of her soul's satisfaction, and adding—"Thou wilt then become thy poor Eustacia's spiritual director, wilt thou not?"

There could be but one answer to that earnest question. An hour yet they passed in sweet and sacred converse, and then the Abbe passed out. Meeting Vivia in the hall, he said—

"Go thou to thy aunt, my child, she will tell thee all that it is requisite thou shouldst know. I depart to send Austin to his mother."

And while he re-entered his carriage and drove off, Vivia rejoined the Abbess. The lady met her with a countenance —oh! so different from that which she had shown but two hours before! so refulgent with a joy that looked through and beyond this world! She caught her hand and clasped it fervently while they sat upon the sofa together, and she spoke—

"Oh Vivia! oh, my darling! what a joy to have the vista of eternal life open to one's tearful eyes! to know that we shall dwell therein in light and love forever! Oh! Vivia, doubtless, lovers are very happy on their bridal day; but we two, who have just now parted to meet no more on earth, except in the sacraments of the church—we two, earth-aged and earth-ruined! we are happier than they! for the aspects of eternity are revealed to us, and we know that the precious love offered upon the sacrificial altar here, will be restored to us in infinitely heightened worth and beauty in Heaven—that death will not sever, but will unite us forever. It is a marriage adjourned from time to eternity—from earth to Heaven! Ah, with such a faith, can we not bear cheerfully, joyously, the burden of the latter days of mortal life? Ah! Vivia! even you wonder at this change in me—in *us;* but listen! it was not the simple fact of separation on this planet that made the misery of either of us! *that* alone—had duty made it necessary—could have been well borne! Ah, no! but the greatest error in our erring lives —the deepest sorrow in our sorrowful hearts, was the doubt of each other's truth! the fear of losing each other in eternity. We doubt no longer, and hence our rejoicing! Listen, now, for I have a story to tell you, my child. That unhappy woman who recently laid sacrilegious hands upon God's sacred gift of life, was the depository of your family history, which she never confided to me. On the contrary, she misled me in regard to your parentage, and bound me to silence by vows that only her death had loosed. But my late interview with Francois Laglorieux has made all the past

clear to me—as I shall presently make it to you. For your history is so interwoven with my own, that to narrate the one will disclose the other. My life, Vivia, ay! my *life* commenced with my first knowledge of Francois Laglorieux. I had *grown* until then, as minerals or plants grew—then I lived!—was it not inevitable I should love my life-inspirer? He was only the young French master in the boarding-school where I was educated. It was a very well conconducted establishment. No one could be more conscientious in the discharge of duty than was the Principal of that institution, and her staff of assistants. There was some half dozen masters in attendance upon the school;—music, dancing, painting, and the languages, each had their professor, and each professor his day and his class. One of the elderly female teachers was always in attendance on the young ladies, upon these occasions. Perhaps it was because Monsieur Laglorieux was very youthful and very prepossessing, that the principal, or her first assistant, was always present with the pupils at his class. But what vigilance can bar the intercommunion of related spirits? I cannot inform you exactly when or through what means it was that I first knew Francois Laglorieux loved me with a heaven-pure passion—or when the soul within me first awoke to life and consciousness in response to that call. Such sacred mysteries of the spirit escape us when we attempt their analysis. But soon, I know, I lived only in him, as he in me! And all this time, no word of love had passed the lips of either, and so vailed was this delicate affection, that not one of my lynx-eyed classmates, far less the teachers, suspected its existence. Yet we were then supremely happy. We never met but in the presence of the teacher and the class, and yet I am sure we never wished for an interview, or a ramble, or dreamed of marriage. I am sure we did not wish to come 'to an understanding,' as it is called. We both rather dreaded that as the breaking of a charm!

We both felt that to have an explanation would have been, to have got further apart—to have come out of that vailed, sweet, subtle, delicious union, of which we were in some beautiful way mutually conscious. Present or absent, we were ever together—ever blessed in each other. Oh! earthly eyes and ears, how short-sighted and dull! In our class-room had Francois' voice dropped but half a tone in speaking to me—had his eyes softened but half a shade in glancing at me—my keen-eyed classmates and exemplary principal would have discovered it. But we lived in each other, and none but ourselves and the Lord knew it! We would meet in the class-room with twenty other persons. Francois might be at one extremity of the room with his face turned from me, and speaking to the principal, and I at the other, with my head bowed over my desk and my eyes fixed on my French exercise—yet there would our spirits meet and blend and part only to meet and blend again. And the glow in either heart was lighted from the life of the other. Those were beautiful and happy days! We were Adam and Eve in Paradise, before the coming of the serpent.

"But, ah! Vivia, the serpent came!"

"Regret is vain, else should I now regret that our love ever took form in thought and speech. At the end of my third scholastic year, my father came unexpectedly and took me from the school. He took me to the hotel to spend the day and night. It was there that Francois sought me to bid me adieu—and it was there amid the pangs of parting, that he first breathed his love, and gave and received vows of eternal fidelity. Oh! that the beautiful love had remained forever a glory of the spirit!—that it had never ultimated in word or deed! I think, if our love had remained unspoken, we could have borne the impending separation better. But when we parted, I lost consciousness of his spiritual presence, if, indeed, his spirit was then

with me. And I pined for his voice and smiles; and when my father conveyed me to his distant home, and when every day's experience only served to inform me in the knowledge that Colonel Malmaison would never, never consent to bestow the hand of his only daughter upon an humble French master, I fell into despondency and illness. My father thought that I needed a companion—and as we were destitute of near relations who might have come to share our home, my father advertised for a suitable young lady to be the home companion of his daughter. That fatal advertisement eventuated in the engagement of Ada Weaver, the cashiered mistress, I have now not the slightest doubt, of the unprincipled English baronet who contrived to palm her off as a respectable young woman, upon the credulity of the simple-hearted country gentleman, my father. Her coming was the coming of the serpent! *Then* was the entrance of sin and sorrow into my paradise. Oh! Vivia! I was young and impressible. She soon magnetized me—I believe that is the new phrase for the old *diablerie*. She—notwithstanding a certain instinct that warned me against her—soon gained my confidence and my secret. Ah! what a desecration of that sweet and sacred mystery to lay it upon a bosom so false! At first she consoled me with a deceptive sympathy, but did not seek to tempt me into error. She had then indeed enough of her own personal interests to engage her attention. She had fixed her fatal eyes upon my younger brother, Philip. He was the very handsomest man I ever saw in my life. It was almost his only attraction, Vivia! And that Albino-Circe was far from indifferent to masculine beauty. You know, of course, that when she had resolved to make him marry her, she accomplished her will! far weaker women than herself do such things with great ease; and it took not a tithe of *her* subtlety to fascinate the son and manage the father. Observe! Colonel Malmaison would have discarded either

of his children for any other *mesalliance*, yet he forgave Philip for *her* sake—forgave him, though the stronger motives of rivalry and jealousy (for the old man doted on the syren) were added to those of family pride for opposing their union. The marriage, however, took place in February. My father left the young couple in possession of the shore plantation, and went up to Mount Storm. He wished me to attend him thither, and to be his housekeeper and his consoler. Would I had gone, as every sentiment of duty and of affection prompted me to do; but, ah! I had fallen, as all of our family had, under the spell of that evil one! She wished to keep me with her for a purpose, and she had her will! I remained. And my father departed alone. It was very soon after his departure that I received a letter—the first letter from Francois—it came quite unexpectedly, for we had arranged no plan of private correspondence—we were too guileless for that. I have since discovered that *she* instigated the writingof that letter by writing to him and telling him I know not what story about the failure of my health and spirits. The surprise and the joy of receiving that letter, blinded me to the impropriety of carrying on the unauthorized correspondence, and she took care that my eyes should not be speedily opened. This correspondence commenced in March, continued uninterrupted until July, when the summer vacation set Francois at liberty, and he came down to the sea-shore, ostensibly for the recruiting of his health, which indeed was weakened and wasted by his arduous duties in the schools of the city—but really to be near me. The sea-coast village at which he lodged, was distant three miles from our plantation. He remained there two months—that is to say, until the first of September. Mrs. Ada, with her sweet sophistries, encouraged our loves and favored our frequent meetings. And when at last the time drew near that we were to part, and Francois was to return to his duties in the city, *she* it was who first ventured to propose to us a private marriage

—pledging herself to afterward obtain the forgiveness of Colonel Malmaison for the irrevocable step. At first I naturally shrank from a course so undutiful and so indelicate; but Francois, backed by Mrs. Malmaison, urged me, and I, with an advocate in my own bosom also, could not long withstand them. We were married—having no other witness to the rites, than Ada Malmaison.

"Yet four weeks longer he remained in our neighborhood before he could tear himself away. Before he left, a plan of correspondence was arranged, by which his letters were to reach me under cover to Mrs. Malmaison, whose correspondence was always sacred. My letters were to be directed and transmitted by her hand to him.

"So he left us. And I never saw him but once again, until I met him this day.

"Well, when he had gone I had little time to give to selfish sorrow, for the clouds began to gather dark, heavy, and threatening over our house.

"My brother Philip, whose health, since his marriage, had steadily declined, was now failing so rapidly, that my father came down from Mount Storm, and conveyed him thither in the hope that the fine, bracing mountain air and pure rock spring water might be able to restore him. He was zealously attended by Ada, from whom, indeed, he could not bear to be separated for an hour. But alas! the mountain air and water had no remedial power for him. The journey thither only wearied and exhausted him. He never rallied from that state of prostration, but died at Mount Storm, within less than a year after his marriage. It has so often been said that 'when sorrows come, they come not single file,' that it seems but a vain repetition to say it over again now. But, in fact, troubles came to us 'in battalions.'

"We had not recovered from the first severe grief for Philip's death, when my father received a letter from Eustace,

announcing his marriage with a French girl of obscure birth. One would have thought that while grieving so deeply for the lost son, he could not have been very angry with the sole living one. But such was not the case. Grief only seemed to deepen and confirm anger. He never showed us the letter or told us the name of the poor girl whom Eustace had taken to wife, but then and there he solemnly renounced him, forbidding us ever to mention the name of his eldest son in his hearing.

"All this while my own individual troubles were pressing me very heavily. I think that all ardent temperaments are addicted to rash confidences, and to jealousies as rash. I had risked, and now began to fear that I had wrecked my whole life's happiness upon that unauthorized marriage.

"The letters of Francois had at first come regularly and frequently, then they came less regularly and frequently. I expressed my uneasiness to Mrs. Malmaison, and she soothed and calmed me into superficial quietude. But as weeks grew into months, the letters came at comparatively rare intervals, and my anxiety rose gradually to fever heat. Still she sought, or *seemed* to seek, to calm me, and to preserve my faith in Francois. She said, no doubt that all was well, that Francois was well, that we should know in time, etc.

"At last the letters ceased altogether. Missive after missive of mine remained unanswered. I grew nearly frantic at every new disappointment. And she had enough to do to conceal my storms of sorrow and prevent an exposure. She implored me to take care of my health; she plied me with narcotics and sedatives; night and day she or her maid Bridget remained with me.

"My father scarcely noticed my failing health and spirits, so much was *his* interest absorbed in the welfare of Mrs. Malmaison, whom he now regarded as the prospective mother of his sole heir. But at length she called his attention to the fact that my strength was declining, and begged

permission to take me down for change of air to the shore plantation. He hesitated long before he gave his consent. It was very difficult for him to accompany us then; but he made Ada promise that she would send for him before the expected family event.

"We went.

"And a few weeks after our arrival, there was, indeed, a male heir born to the Malmaison estate; but, the babe reputed to be the posthumous child of Philip Malmaison and Ada his wife, was really mine. That unhappy Bridget, and Doctor Thogmorton, were necessarily in the secret.

"As may be judged, Colonel Malmaison had not been summoned *before*, and was not for several weeks *after* the birth of his grandchild. When at last he came, Ada very gracefully playing the invalid, gave him no time to ask why he had not been sent for—but anticipated that purpose by gently reproaching her 'dear father' for not coming at once, in compliance with the request contained in the letter. 'Letter? What letter? He had received none,' he said. Ada knew that perfectly well; but answered that it must have been lost. So the scapegoat of a lost letter bore off all the blame. Now, had her deception in respect to that infant been found out, she would have excused her whole action by her regard for his daughter's honor and his own peace, and would have compelled him, instead of blaming her perfidy, to praise her fidelity! But, oh! the unspeakable —yes!—the inconceivable misery of my own heart during the days that followed.

"Still no word came of Francois. And even Ada had now ceased to bid me hope, but bade me try to divert my mind and think of something else. And she procured entertaining books for me. They were old-fashioned romances, the staple of which, with variations, was always false marriages, abductions, betrayals,—still the same revolting story of woman's pitiable weakness and credulity, and man's vio-

lence or treachery—until my very soul sickened with self-loathing at these reflected images of itself. For several of these seemed parallel cases to my own. Was there not in *my* case, also, the secret courtship, the clandestine marriage, the separation, then the letters, few and far between, and finally ceasing altogether? Ah! it seemed to me too true that the parallel was complete all through, and that my Francois was—what I will not wrong him now by repeating! Palliate my folly, oh, Vivia! for I was but sixteen and had no wise friend. Still my love pleaded for Francois, against all this circumstantial evidence. Time that comforts grief does but aggravate suspense. I grew worse. Still Mrs. Malmaison plied me with sedatives and narcotics, and furnished me with books. Her whole treatment was directed to one end—namely—without self-compromise, yet surely—to confirm my mind in the belief of Francois' perfidy and to subdue me to my fate. Hence the character of her practice upon mind and body. There was one secret I kept from her.

"I was moved by an irresistible impulse to proceed to the city, and to find our for myself what had prevented Francois from writing or coming. But this cherished purpose I kept to myself. I felt sure that Mrs. Malmaison would oppose it. And I knew the strength of her will too well to engage it. Now whether my strong constitution had by the habitual use of sedatives grown accustomed to and conquered their effects, or whether Mrs. Malmaison no longer administered them in their first strength I know not; but certainly as autumn approached and the family talked of returning to the interior, my restlessness increased—my wish to seek out my husband became an insufferable god; and so one night—the very night before the purposed return of the family to Mount Storm—I gathered together what valuable jewels I possessed, took the money I had been saving for this very emergency, made them up into a packet,

put it, with a change of clothing, into a small carpet-bag, dressed myself in dark brown as an unattractive costume, tied a thick vail over my bonnet, and at twelve o'clock, when the family were all in bed and probably asleep, and on foot I commenced my journey to the distant turnpike where the stage coach would pass to take me up.

"Vivia! I do not intend to dwell upon all the toils and sorrows of a journey, and a search that ended in despair. In time I reached the city of my destination. And after a weary seeking and great misconstruction, and many rebuffs, and not a few affronts, I learned that Francois had gone to M———, his native city in France.

"Vivia, I followed him! I went to France! Why I did not die instead, I do not know! Why, above all, I did not die *afterward*, I can no more tell.

"After a stormy voyage of three months we reached M———, and there I recommenced my search. I had no idea before of what a formidable enterprise it was to seek for an obscure individual throughout a strange city. To economize my means, I took the humblest, decent lodgings that I could find.

"But a month of fruitless seeking had reduced me to despair before I thought of applying to the police. It was even then the last and bitterest resource, but I resorted to it—offering liberal payment for information. And in twenty-four hours, Vivia, I received intelligence that Monsieur Francois Laglorieux lived at a small *cabane* about three miles out of town, on the road to V———. I lost no time; I set out immediately; and after a ride of half an hour, reached the lane leading between two green hedges to the cottage. It was nearly dusk, and something prompted me to steal upon and surprise Francois.

"At the head of the lane I jumped off my tired nag, and gave him in charge of a little *paysan*.

"'*Qui vive dans la cabane, mon enfant?*' I inquired.

"'*Monsieur Francois*,' replied the child.

"'Seulement?'

"'*Non, madame—avec son femme.*'

"'Son femme!'—the word was ambiguous—I hardly dared to hazard the next question.

"'*Son femme mariee?*'

"'*Oui, madame*,' replied the child, unconscious of the stab his answer gave me.

"With my heart slowly beating as though it were about to stop forever, I walked softly up the shadows of the lane, my dark dress toning in with the dark hues around, making me quite invisible. So unobserved I approached the cot. It was so tiny that a hop vine covered not only the porch but the whole building, roof and chimney.

"'As I drew near, the sound of voices stole softly upon my ear. I could only distinguish that the first was the voice of a woman, and the second that of Francois. Just Heaven! how I suffered.

"Then by the faint light of a lamp that gleamed through the lattice of the parlor window and fell upon the end of the vine-shaded porch, I saw two figures, saw them distinctly in that partial but bright illumination. One was that of my Francois—his dress poor, his face was pale, his countenance was very sorrowful. By his side, reclining upon his bosom, while his arm was thrown tenderly around her, and his head inclined lovingly toward her, sat one of the most delicately beautiful women I ever saw.

"A pang of jealousy like the sword of death pierced my bosom at that sight, yet I looked on—slaying myself through my eyes. She was scarcely passed childhood, yet on the eve of motherhood! I gazed, and soon she spoke again, raising her lovely face.

"'I feel that I shall die, Francois,' she said, very sadly.

"'Nay, my dearest love, that is but nervousness; all

women in your circumstances are haunted with that fear. It means nothing that should alarm you.'

"'Ah! but all women have not suffered as I already have done.'

"'The more reason my Genevieve, that you should suffer no longer. We are very poor it is true, but no real necessary of life shall you want if my labor, ay! or my life will purchase it; but cheer up—we shall yet see better days.'

"These and other words of tenderest solicitude flowed from his lips as he embraced and bent over her; while in extremest bitterness of spirit I looked on and listened. Who had soothed *me* in my greatest need I asked myself.

"Oh! I had thought to be prepared for just some such a denouement as this—but now! the blow fell with all the crushing and annihilating force of a thunder-bolt. Stunned, blinded, reeling, insensible but for the burning anguish of my heart, I moved from the spot; as one in a terrible dream I performed the journey back to town.

"The next day I embarked on a homeward-bound ship—one only purpose in my heart—to see my child again and die.

"The very day of sailing I was struck down with a low, nervous fever, that lasted during the greater time of the voyage.

"There were some nuns of the Order of Visitation going over to the United States to carry their rule to a new branch of the mother house at G———. They nursed me with tenderness and skill. And by the time the ship anchored at Norfolk harbor I was able to go on shore. Something in the placid faces of those dear nuns had laid my restlessness to rest, and smoothed and charmed my heart to peace. Bidding them adieu I took their address.

"Then I pursued my sad journey homeward. But when I reached the last stage on the road, where yet my identity was unknown, I stopped, left my baggage at the inn, and

with the same thick vail concealing my features, I set out for Mount Storm.

"I did not intend to make myself known to any but Mrs. Malmaison or Bridget, and dreaded discovery by other members of the household. Therefore I dare not approach any entrance of the house, and thus days passed before chance presented the opportunity I desired.

"At last, however, it happened that I met Bridget as she was returning from early mass. I believe I nearly frightened that poor woman out of her senses by suddenly raising my vail and addressing her by name. When, however, she had recovered her surprise, she readily promised to deliver my message to Mrs. Malmaison. And she kept her word.

"An hour from that time Ada and myself met within the walls of the church, always open, yet at that hour empty. Oh, Vivia! I threw myself upon the bosom of that false woman and poured out all my sorrowful story.

"'My poor child! had you confided in me, I should have saved you that terrible experience! I should have informed you of that which before I had hesitated to pain you by telling—namely, of the perfidy of your lover, of which I I had secretly sought, and obtained proofs. My poor Eustacia, that woman whom you saw was his wedded wife months before he ever saw your face,' she said.

"I thought I knew it—had known it long, yet hearing her say it—I could not suppress a cry of pain. She tried to calm me.

"She spoke of my child's future. She said that Austin must remain as her own child in her own sole possession. Most speciously she glozed over the sin of deception and imposition by reasoning that the babe was as much the grandson of Colonel Malmaison as if he had been really Philip's child instead of mine, and that therefore he was quite as much entitled to his care and protection. That the infant was entirely innocent of the sins of his parents,

and should be exempt from their punishment, which would surely fall heavily as wrongfully upon him were the secret of his birth made known. Finally, that the discovery of that mystery would certainly kill or craze Colonel Malmaison, while, on the other hand, the judicious concealment of it would wrong no one, but on the contrary would preserve and bless the child, and make the old man happy in his heir.

"I was in her hands. I was sinking, despairing, all but dying—all my power—all my inner life seemed stricken unto death. I had no force to resist her—she did with me what she would. After such an escapade I could not return home—she said. That I know well, but disregarded

"'Who fall from all they know of bliss,
Care little into what abyss.'

"She said a convent was the only shelter left me. The Mother's house of refuge!—the sanctuary!—it seemed to open its arms to invite me to its rest! to receive my tempest-tossed and weary soul upon its quiet, holy bosom! I consented. I thought that I could lay down there and die.

"Mrs. Malmaison then appointed a rendezvous with me in the city, promising to bring my child with her when she came.

"I hastened on to Baltimore, where she—having made some plausible pretext for her journey, accompanied by her confidential servant, Bridget, and bringing the infant, soon joined me.

"We spent a day together, and then I took leave of my babe, leaving him at the hotel in the care of Bridget, and set out, attended by Mrs. Malmaison, for the Convent of M———. I think my heart was just then palsied, it suffered so little in parting from the babe.

"We reached the Convent, which I entered as a postulant.

And Mrs. Malmaison took leave of me and returned to her adopted child, and then to her home. Let me hurry over what remains. My noviciate was short, and at the end of six months I received the black vail Well! the reaction of my life of excitement, the calmness, the beauty and the holiness of the sphere of devotion around me, soothed the restlessness of my spirit into a sort of rest. Months of comparative serenity passed. 'Content—not happy'—might then have been said of me also. While still believing Francois guilty, I forgave, as I could not choose but love him. I prayed for him daily. And then from this mood sprang the hope that he might not have been so guilty toward me as he seemed. Somehow, as my soul grew calm, this hope strengthened into a conviction against all evidence.

"Time passed. I was changed to this Convent, and some years after my arrival, I was made its Abbess.

"At last the night came when you made your appearance at our house. You bore the impress of his features, you called yourself a native of the village of Belles-œuvres, in France, stated your age to be ten years—called yourself by his name. All this was circumstantial evidence so strong, that I did not for an instant doubt that you were his child. How entirely I had forgiven him, you may know from the memory of the attachment I conceived for you, believed to be his child.

"Mrs. Malmaison soon detected this mistake, and favored it. She gave me to understand, not by direct assertion so much as by inference, that you were the child of Francois Laglorieux and of her own half sister. And that impression was never wholly erased until to-day. It is true that years, experience and reason had done much to confirm my instinctive justification of Francois and doubt of Ada. So much for my own personal experience of that woman's du-

plicity. Now for the synopsis of her practices upon Francois, confided by him to me this day.

"In the first place, in comparing notes, we find that she intercepted our letters—and wrote to him fictitious accounts of my excellence of health and spirits, but also of my father's fierce and haughty temper, that Francois might practice discretion, and at the same time feel perfectly easy upon my account, while refraining from visiting me. Ah, well! I was, as I have intimated, half prepared to hear of that unhappy woman's treachery; but not so ready for what was next disclosed to me. To go back a little, while I was at school, my brother, Eustace, in his casual visits to me, had formed a slight acquaintance with the young French master. And when Eustace went to town, preparatory to sailing for the Eastern continent, he again met, or rather indeed, *sought* Francois Laglorieux, to obtain from him some information about modern Paris. Francois, while imparting all the practical knowledge he could bestow upon the subject, also entrusted to Eustace letters, and presents, and money for the mother and sister he had left behind in France, and who were still dependant upon the young French teacher for support. Eustace cordially accepted the commission, and even after his arrival in France, went to see them at their home in the little village of Belles-œuvres. His presence was opportune —he found Madame Laglorieux in a mortal illness, and Genevieve, the sister, in great affliction. The beauty and the sorrow of this young creature equally impressed the susceptible nature of Eustace. He delivered the remittances entrusted to him by Francois, offered his services to the family, and lost no time in writing to inform the latter of the state of affairs at Belles-œuvres. But delay followed delay. The navigation of the ocean, and even the overland mail routes were not then what they are now. Railroads were rare, and steamships unknown. M—— was the nearest sea-port, and an unusually long time intervened before the

sailing of a vessel for the United States, and that one was bound for New Orleans. You will understand now how it was that five months had elapsed before that letter found its way to Francois. It reached him long after his marriage with me, and his return to his duties in the city schools. Then there ensued the delay before a ship sailed for M——. It was yet nearly a month before he would get an opportunity to embark. At length, however, he wrote me a letter explaining the necessity of his voyage, and promising a speedy return. A letter which, being entrusted to Mrs. Malmaison, of course, never reached me. He then set sail, and after a voyage of two months, arrived at M——, and hastened out to Belles-œuvres, where he learned with deep grief that his mother had been for some months deceased—but also that Eustace Malmaison had married the beautiful orphan. There was then an exchange of confidences between the young brothers-in-law. Francois confided to Eustace the secret of his marriage with me, and his consequent obligations to return immediately to America to be *near* me, if not *with* me. And he became the bearer of letters from Eustace to his father—letters which being entrusted to Mrs. Malmaison, shared the fate of other trusts confided to that conscientious woman's care. Eustace must have been very sanguine of his father's forgiveness, for at the time of Francois's embarkation for the United States, Eustace, with his youthful bride, proceeded on his tour of Europe, spending recklessly the money that should have been spared for their future contingencies. Francois reached home to find one letter from me that Mrs. Malmaison had thought proper to transmit. It was a letter fondly reproaching him for his long silence. He replied to it—explaining that silence by the long voyage which he said he had previously announced to me, and from which he had returned as quickly as a letter could have returned—for he had come back in the first homeward-bound ship. Of course, that

epistle was never permitted to reach me, nor did I ever hear of it until to-day. At that very time, while I was breaking my heart at the supposed neglect of Francois, he was writing to Mrs. Malmaison again and again to explain the cause of my silence; and she was putting him off with one after another of the most plausible excuses. At last, Francois resolved to come down and see me, and announced his intention to Mrs. Malmaison, who wrote back by return mail, imploring him not to think of so rash a measure—telling him that Colonel Malmaison was furious about the marriage of his son, and that Eustace joined herself in entreating him not to approach the house or further risk enraging her old and suffering father, etc. etc, for there was a great deal more of it. Francois began to doubt the fidelity of my affection for him, and wrote to me to that effect, an epistle, which, of course, went no further than Mrs. Malmaison's honest hands. While Francois still cherished the purpose of coming to me, and only waited for my answer to his letter before setting out for Mount Storm, he one day received a letter from his sister, filled with lamentations, announcing the death of her husband, who had fallen a victim to the annual fever at M——, and begging Francois to come over to her at once, for that she was ill, alone, and in great need. Francois immediately enclosed his poor sister's letter with one from himself for me, in an envelope directed to Mrs. Malmaison, (who, of course, suppressed the whole,) and then he sailed for M——, arrived in due time, and hastened out to Belles-œuvres, where he found his sister alone in the little cottage formerly occupied by his mother. She was in desperate need. And Francois himself was almost equally poor, having spent his slender earnings in the voyage. But he promised to remain and take care of her until she should be well enough to return with him to the United States. And then, failing to get any sort of remunerative employment, he sold his watch and

chain, and seals—then his dressing case—and even finally his best suit of clothes to supply his necessities. * * * It was at this time that I in my frantic impatience and grief left the safe shelter of my own home and my father's protection to seek Francois. And it was here, after a long and weary search, that I at last found him, in the village at Belles-œuvres. And the delicate creature that I so naturally mistook for his love, was his only sister, my own brother's youthful widow, your own beautiful mother, Vivia! There! now you know all! Only that they grew daily poorer—that Francois denied himself the necessaries of life that Genevieve might have its comforts—that he would not allow himself a sufficiency of coarse food, lest she should not have an abundance of fine. Finally, severe privations, together with grief and anxiety, threw him upon a bed of sickness. And Genevieve was forced to enter the hospital. You have heard that your mother went to Heaven the day that you came into this world, Vivia? Ah! well, Francois, your uncle, lost no time after his convalescence, in removing you from the hospital. He gave you your mother's full name in baptism—called you Genevieve Laglorieux—placed you temporarily in the charge of the sisterhood at the Convent of Belles-œuvres—and then he returned to America, wrote to your grandfather, giving all the particulars of your birth, and commending you to his care. Mrs. Malmaison intercepted and answered that letter—telling him that Colonel Malmaison utterly refused to acknowledge the infant or hold any sort of communication with the family into which his son had married; and finally crushing Francois with the intelligence of my disappearance from the neighborhood, misrepresenting that event as a wanton elopement, a heinous act of unfaithfulness to him. In a conflict of grief, dismay, and incredulity, Francois hastened up into the neighborhood of Mount Storm, where he failed of obtaining an interview with Colonel Malmaison, but suc-

ceeded in meeting Ada, whose spoken words confirmed her letters, and where he everywhere heard her version of the elopement corroborated; for it is needless to say that that woman, through the agency of Bridget, had set her own account of the family misfortune in circulation through the neighborhood. There were dozens who would have told him, could they have induced him to listen, all the details of Miss Malmaison's running away with a handsome stranger, whom no one believed to possess a farthing to support her. When, at that very time I was—as it were—dying with grief while passing through my noviciate at the Convent of M——. About the same time that I received the black vail, Francois, ignorant of my fate, and in despair at my supposed guilt, returned to France, assumed the guardianship of his infant niece, yourself, Vivia, indignantly repudiated the name of Malmaison, and gave you his own, and placed you for nurture and education a permanent pensioner at the Convent of Belles-œuvres, and in the course of a year himself entered holy orders. However, as years passed, notwithstanding Mrs. Malmaison's utmost vigilance, Colonel Malmaison heard a rumor that his eldest son, Eustace, had died and left a motherless little girl in France. Time and death had calmed his anger against Eustace, and he wished to do justice to the orphan. He instituted further inquiries that were so baffled and defeated by Mrs. Malmaison's persevering diplomacy, that all he learned in years was the name of the orphan's guardian. Then he wrote a letter, sent it to the care of the Superior General of the Jesuits, whence it was sure to find and reach the humblest member of that order for whom it might be intended, and whence at last it found its way to Father Francis, who was then, you know, the parish priest at Fermanagh, in Ireland, where you also resided a pupil at that Convent school. That letter brought you over, Vivia. Yet that woman, Ada, succeeded in preventing a meeting and defeating the great object

of your voyage. She had art sufficient to silence and send off Francois, then the wickedness to destroy all evidence of your identity, and pass you off upon the world as her niece, while to me she affected to confide the secret that you were the child of her half-sister. And but for poor Bridget's late repentance, which cost that poor creature her life, we should never have had the clue to this mystery."

"But what could have been the motive of that wretched woman to engage in such a complication of deception?" inquired Vivia, in a sort of horror.

"To secure to herself the male heir, and through him to further secure the use of the vast inheritance—wealth, rank, position, and social consequence!"

Thus the nun and the maiden continued to converse upon the subject of the narrative just related by the former, until their attention was arrested by a ring at the hall door-bell, soon followed by the appearance of the Mother-Portress with the announcement of

"A visitor for the Mother-Superior—a young gentleman."

"Oh Heaven, it is my child at last! it is Austin! Go, my dear Vivia, and receive him, and bring him hither," faltered the Abbess in a feeble voice, as she sank back nearly fainting in her chair, and with one hand covered her face.

In a few moments, while she still sat thus, she felt some one gently sink at her feet, and as gently raise her disengaged hand and press it to his lips. And unvailing her eyes she beheld her son on his knee before her, still holding her hand while his gaze was lifted fondly, reverently to her face.

"Oh, Austin! Oh, my child!" she cried passionately, rising and throwing up her arms.

He started up suddenly to receive her, as with a gush of irrepressible tears she fell upon his neck.

"My mother—my dear mother," he said, folding her to his bosom, and then holding her there in reverential silence.

"Austin! oh, Austin!" she cried, amid bursts of emotion, "my child—my child, I am a stranger to you—to you, whom, absent and unclaimed, I have ever loved with more than a mother's tenderness—yes, Austin, with more—infinitely more—for that sorrowful affection was mingled with all a mother's bitter and passionate remorse! And now, Austin! now! I am a stranger to you—to you, who have always lived in my heart! how wonderful! how terrible!" she groaned with a shudder.

"No, my own dear mother! not a stranger are you to me, but a mother very intimate and very, very sweet to my heart you are. Listen, dear mother, for many years you have been familiar to my mind and dear to my heart. First of all from a casual sight of your beloved face as you stood distributing food to the poor at the Convent gate—your pale, beneficent face, that ever after with a sweet and solemn influence haunted my mind—then, when I came to know you through the frequent conversation of our Vivia, so that when finally our mutual relations were made known to me, I was prepared to hail with joy the intelligence, and was also enabled to interpret by natural causes the seemingly occult attraction I had always felt toward you. Ah! no, my mother! not strange, but familiar, congenial, sweet, consoling are you to me, as may Heaven grant I may be to you," said Austin, as, amid the tenderest and most reverential caresses, he replaced her in the chair, and seated himself at her feet.

Vivia silently withdrew, and left word with the portress that she should return to spend the night with the Mother-Superior.

On this, the first day of her arrival, Vivia had many friends to see, and as they could not yet know of her presence in the neighborhood, the quickest and the simplest course was for her to go and seek them. There was no carriage at hand but that in which Austin had come, and

of which she did not wish to deprive him. But there was Brother Peter's old mule Salome, and there was a side-saddle for the use of the Sisters when they had to call Salome's sturdy strength into service to convey some one of them upon a distant visit of charity. Vivia hastened down to Brother Peter at the gate. She found the old man in his rusty black gown and round skull-cap sitting in the door reading his "office" under the shade of the vines. He was so intent upon his task that he did not observe her approach.

"Brother Peter."

"*Deus Iræ—Deus—*"

"I say, Brother Peter."

"*Deus Iræ*—don't interrupt me—when I am praising the Lord! *Deus Iræ—*" continued the old man without looking up.

"Do you call that praising the Lord? To me it sounds fearfully like reproaching Him."

"Eh? oh! is it you, my child? Yes, in a moment! *Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto.*"

"Ah! that will do better."

"Now, child, I can listen to you. But how glad I am to see you then! There has been a wondrous going to and fro, and driving up and down between the Convent and the world. But I did not think in all their bringing they had brought you, my dear!" said the old man cordially.

"Or that I had brought *you* two new cassocks, a half-dozen velvet caps, and a hamper of *real* port wine, which, I think, is good for one of your age!"

"So it is, child! so it is! notwithstanding fanaticism. There should be moderation in all things, my dear, and most especially in temperance! And I thank you heartily for your gift, and I promise faithfully to drink a single glass every day at dinner, and to give a bottle of it to any sick that need it."

"And now will you lend me Salome to ride over to Red Ridge?"

"Right willingly, my child. Sit you here while I order her to be saddled and brought down." So saying the old man hobbled away on his errand. And in ten minutes the mule was brought, the young lady mounted, and on her way to Red Ridge.

When she reached the farm-house, notwithstanding that the farm appeared in a flourishing condition, and the house in good keeping, there was an atmosphere of gloom and disappointment about the place which Vivia felt without being able to explain; but which was interpreted when riding up to the gate, she inquired of the little negro boy that came to take her horse—

"Is Mrs. Basil at home?"

"No, miss. Marse Basil and Miss Theodora done gone."

"Gone! where?"

"Id' know, miss."

"When did they go?

"Id' know, miss—'tother week!"

Finding she could get but little satisfaction from this small sample of a groom, she alighted, gave him the reins, and was walking up to the house, when the door suddenly opened and old Mrs. Wildman, Miss Elizabeth, Helen and Miss Nelly Parrot, who had caught sight of her from the window, all rushed out to greet her, and amid exclamations of joy they hurried her into the house, took off her bonnet and gloves, and seated her in the pleasantest seat by the window.

And then Vivia had to listen to poor old Mrs. Wildman's gratitude and praises of Austin, before she could find an opportunity of inquiring for Theodora.

"Ah! my dear child," replied the old lady, "Theodora never fully recovered her health, and just about the time

that we heard of poor Ada Malmaison's death, and of your being expected home, Basil happened to take it into his head that the Bedford water would be good for Theodora, and as Wakefield Brunton's summer vacation had commenced, they made a party to go there for a couple of months. Basil and Wakefield, and Dora and Helen were to be the set—but Helen, you see, concluded at last to stay at home and save money and help me, good girl, Miss Genevieve."

"We were all very much shocked at hearing of Mrs. Malmaison's death! pray, was she ill long?"

"No, Miss Elizabeth. She died suddenly."

"Dear me, how shocking. What was her disease—congestion of the brain? attack of the heart? or what?" inquired Miss Elizabeth, with a look of sincere sympathy.

"It is a most painful subject, please let us not pursue it," said Vivia, turning pale.

"Ah! forgive me, my dear, I was very, very thoughtless; but I would not have willingly distressed you for the world."

"Humph!" ejaculated Miss Nelly Parrot, in a tone of such emphatic irony as decided Vivia to give a plain and direct, though to her audience, a perfectly safe, because utterly unintelligible answer. "Mrs. Malmaison died of hydrocyanic acid, Miss Parrot."

"Ah! she did! and does that always kill suddenly?"

"Very suddenly, Miss Parrot."

"Oh, yes, so it does!" I recollect.

"Hy—hy"—said Mrs. Wildman, in a musing tone—"well I never heern tell of *that* complaint before, though the doctors do have so many *new* names for old complaints, that it does bother my head! Now no longer than last week I was scared out of my life thinking one of my nigger men was going to be a moon-struck madman, because the doctor allowed how he had the *new-moonery*—when he come

to find out it was nothing but an inflammation in the chest. And here t'other winter, Dr. Thogmorton e'en a'most driv the last nail in my coffin, with telling of me—and the words has run in my head ever since—how I had the chronic facial *new*-rology—when what do you think, but it was just nothing at all but the old-fashioned rheumatis! Now I do suppose that this hy—hy"—

"How I do despise ignorance!" interjected Miss Parrot, "perfectly despise it! But after all, how should a person of your rank know that hydra—hydra—hem, hem! *hydra —what's its name*, means being bit by a mad dog!"

Here silence fell upon the little company, and they thought they understood why it was that Vivia could not bear any allusion to the subject. When next they spoke, it was upon another topic. And soon after, Vivia took her leave.

"So Wakefield also has gone—well! perhaps it is as well!" thought Vivia, as she turned her mule's head up the mountain-path that led to the widow Brunton's. The place was so improved that Vivia could scarcely recognize it. The dear old log hut had been put in complete repair. The fences were in excellent keeping, and the garden and the meadow in a very flourishing condition. The widow was spinning under the shade of the trees before her cottage door, but she turned with joy to greet Vivia as the latter alighted from her mule.

"Wakefield has gone to Bedford to earn a little money, as assistant-clerk of the house during the season," said his mother, "but I am quite sure that he did not know that you were expected home so soon, Miss Genevieve, or he would have remained here at your orders."

"But I have no claim upon Wakefield's time, Mrs. Brunton," said Vivia, gently.

"Yes! every sort of claim to his most devoted service, Miss Genevieve. He is at once your beneficiary and your almoner," said the widow, affectionately.

"Where are your daughters, Mrs. Brunton?" inquired Vivia, as well to change the subject as from the interest she felt in those young girls.

"Oh, Alice is with me, but her sister Annie has entered the Convent as a postulant."

"And are you willing that Annie should take the vail?" inquired Vivia, gravely.

"Willing! certainly, I only wish her welfare and her happiness—and since she finds that in the life of a Sister of Charity, why, Heaven bless her! so let it be!"

"Mrs. Brunton," said Vivia, after a pause, "there are changes now in progress in this neighborhood, that are likely to affect—among others—you and myself. In the first place there is to be opened, in September, a seminary for boys, that will be the end of Wakefield's little school. *That* we cannot, for his sake, regret, since it will send him forth into the great world, where his talents will have a far wider range of usefulness."

"Ah! may the Lord grant that last!"

"And now, Mrs. Brunton, in the second place, in the division of my grandfather's estate, the other heirs have determined to give me for my portion, the new house at Sunset Hills. I wish to keep house, in which case I shall need a matron to give conventional propriety to my establishment. Well, then, when Wakefield shall have left this place to make a fortune for you, will you in the meanwhile come and live with me?"

From her astonishment the widow was unable to answer —and Vivia continued.

"Of course you will also bring Alice."

"Miss Genevieve!"

"I know it is a grave thing I ask of you, to break up your old home and come and be the mother of a lonely girl; but you know me, dear Mrs. Brunton, and can rely on my word, when I tell you that it shall be the study of my life

to make you happy, as though you were indeed my mother."

"I know you would. Oh! my darling! it is not that!"

"You are thinking that Wakefield will have no home to come to, when he re-visits this neighborhood. He will, however; for we will furnish a room joining yours and Alice's, and keep it for him when he comes to see you, and we will call it Wakefield's room."

"Miss Genevieve"—began the widow, and then her voice broke, and the tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Come, I see I have been too hasty with my proposition. You must take a little time to consider it. And by the day that I shall be ready to take possession of my new house, I hope that you may be willing to join me," said Vivia, gently.

"My darling, it is not *that*, either! my blessed one, don't you know that you could not ask me any thing that I would not do for you? And if this were a thing that required any sacrifice on my part—don't you know how quickly I would accept of it? But you offer me, in your delicate way, a luxurious home, with leisure, and with your companionship, and all that I have perhaps craved, but surely never hoped to possess, and—ought I to take it?"

"Dear Mrs. Brunton, the world would never permit me, a young, unmarried woman, to keep house without the presence of some respectable elderly matron. In a word, I cannot, and will not attempt to do so, unless you consent to confer on me this favor."

"Favor! good Heavens!"

"And as I said—I will give you your own time to consider it, and your own terms in accepting it. And now I must return, as I sleep at the Convent to-night. Good-by."

"Good-by—and the Lord forever bless you, my dear child."

When Vivia returned to the Convent, she found that Father Francis and Austin had not left the premises, but were temporarily lodged in the building appropriated to the Bishop on the occasions of his annual visits. From the parlor of this house Austin descried her approach, and came out to receive her.

"Theodora?" he inquired, as he joined her, and they turned their steps toward the Bishop's lodgings.

"I did not see her; Basil has taken her to Bedford Springs."

"I think that was well. Yes; I am glad of it for many reasons. Had she been at home it would have seemed unkind in me to keep away; and yet I could not meet her with composure. And her absence, besides relieving me of that embarrassment, will give us the opportunity of doing all we wish for them at their home."

"Yes, I thought of that."

"By the way, Vivia, do you know that there has been a discussion between my parents and myself. My parents, both vowed to the altar, have determined to waive their prior claims to our patrimony in my favor. And—inasmuch as I thus come into the possession of the greater portion of my grandfather's estate, they have thought it best that I should retain his name—and I think so too. So that is settled."

"And what are our plans for the autumn?"

"Father Francis—as he commands me still to call him—will remain in this neighborhood and lodge at Gray Rock, where he will superintend the preparations for the seminary. He thinks that you and myself, if we can procure a proper chaperone, had best carry into effect our proposed tour of the Eastern continent."

"That will be admirable! In the mean time I will install Mrs. Brunton and her daughter at Sunset Hills, to keep the house warm while we are gone and to give us a welcome

when we return. And, Austin! I wish you to invite Wakefield to accompany us."

"Why, Vivia!"

"Yes! certainly, it will add tenfold to the pleasure of our tour, and be of great convenience to us also, since Wakefield has taught himself several Eastern languages."

"But will he go?"

"Yes! The seminary will swallow up his school. His mother will be provided for. His occupation will be gone, and you will tender him the situation of traveling tutor, interpreter, secretary, guide, for the duties of either or all of which his character and education singularly fit him. Therefore he will accompany us."

"It shall be as you say, Vivia," said Austin, smiling.

Vivia and Austin went zealously to work to make their friends and proteges as happy and comfortable as possible before leaving them.

Austin rode over to the Red Ridge farm to make examinations, and take notes of what he could do to improve the place and the mode of culture. Old Mrs. Wildman received him; but it was Helen, who affecting to consider him still as their landlord, accompanied him all over the premises.

In a week Austin repeated his visit of inspection. The next week he went twice. The third week three times; the fourth week he rode over every day. Helen was always his guide and interlocutor.

Vivia meanwhile prepared rooms at her house for the residence of Mrs. Brunton and Alice, who were to remove thither as soon as Wakefield should return from Bedford, for the widow said she wanted to stay and receive her son once more in the old home.

At the end of six weeks, Austin one day said to Vivia,

"I made the proposal to Wakefield, and he has accepted

it; he goes with us. And now I want you to do something benevolent."

"Well?"

"Invite Miss Wildman to go with you as your companion; you will need one. And Miss Helen is a very intelligent, vivacious young lady, who will add much to the life of our little party. And it would confer a great privilege and pleasure upon the young creature to give her this —the only opportunity she can ever have of seeing Europe."

"Well, why do you not answer?"

"Austin, because I am troubled! I do not want a companion, least of all Helen, whom I cannot find it in my heart to like!"

"I am grieved, Vivia," said Austin, in a tone of regret, "to find such a prejudice existing in your mind. I have quite set my heart on having this intellectual young girl enjoy the privilege of seeing Europe. What is the use of wealth, if we cannot confer happiness with it? You will like her better on a closer acquaintance, Vivia. It was so with me. Now, I confess I was once considerably prejudiced against Helen, but the more I see of her, the better I like her. Think of her giving up her first season at the Springs, to stay at home and help her grandmother during the absence of her brother. There are very few girls who would have made such a sacrifice."

"That was well," said Vivia, glad to have any thing to approve.

"I assure you she is a remarkably superior girl, Vivia, and really we must not remember the hoydenism of her childhood against her—"

"It would be unjust to do that."

"You will help me, then, to confer the benefit of travel upon this interesting girl."

"Oh, Austin, benefit her in some other way! forego your present purpose!"

"I cannot, indeed, dear Vivia! I have quite set my heart upon it!"

"Deny your heart!"

"But why?"

"I can give you no other reason than I have already given; but why, I ask you in my turn, Austin, do you persevere in this?"

"*Not*, Vivia, that I have any *personal* interest beyond friendship and benevolence for this young lady. I have loved once, and forever, Vivia! I can never love another!" said Austin, in a tone of such deep mournfulness, that Vivia's sympathies were strongly awakened. "But," he continued, "my sorrowful love need not make me close my heart against humanity. On the contrary, all the consolation I ever expect to find, aside from you, Vivia, is in delighting and blessing others. I only wish to please this young Helen with two years of what would seem to her an almost impossible happiness."

Vivia felt that Austin was perfectly sincere in what he said. He spoke the *truth of the time*, at least, and she could longer oppose him.

Thus, by the first of October, all their plans were arranged.

The seminary for boys was in full operation.

Mrs. Brunton was established in Vivia's house.

And Wakefield had returned to join his party, who, accompanied by a respectable elderly lady, as chaperone, took leave of their friends, and set out for New York, whence they took the steamer for Europe.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE SPECTRE.

"Oh, not in judgment and not in wrath,
Came the Angel of Death that day."

It was the Christmas following the departure of Vivia and her party for the East, that old Mrs. Brunton mounted her mule to ride over to Red Ridge. The cause of her visit was that she had just got a letter from Wakefield, containing news of such importance, that she felt obliged, immediately, to communicate it to the family most concerned.

The snow lay deep upon the ground, and the roads were in the very worst condition; that is to say, a thaw had been arrested half-way by a freeze, and the roads were full of knots and pits and glassy sheets of ice, more dangerous than all. The air was, besides, piercingly cold.

But little did the hardy old woman mind the state of the atmosphere or the earth, when her heart was set upon any purpose. And so, sturdily, in her old gray serge cloak and gray felt bonnet, she rode along; her sure-footed mule going cautiously down the side of the hills, putting his first foot forward, and letting it slide till he should find a safe rest, and then bringing the other hoof along and advancing it in the same manner—and so down the hills, and across the mirror-like sheets of ice in the valley, and along the cedar-fringed banks of Mad River, and around its bend and up the steep ascent of North Mountain to Red Ridge.

It was after the early dinner hour of the family that Mrs. Brunton knocked at the door, which was opened by Basil,

who met the visitor with a cordial welcome, and brought her in to the family sitting-room.

The four women of the house were sitting around a fine fire of hickory logs, and they were all, with the exception of the old lady, engaged in knitting.

Mrs. Wildman was spinning on the little wheel, but rose up and welcomed and seated the visitor.

"Well, when did you hear from our friends abroad, ladies?" inquired the widow, after a few minutes.

"It has been more than five weeks since we got the last letter. The mails must be very uncertain, for I am sure we do not get more than half the letters written to us," said Theodora.

"To be sure! I s'pose not, indeed! neither do I; but any way, I got a letter last night!"

"Oh, did you! what date? how were they all? when are they going into Asia?" were the questions immediately rained upon the old woman.

"Hish! one at a time! What was the last news you heard of them, Mrs. Basil?"

"Nothing particular—only that they were all well—staying at Rome for a while, and expecting next to go to Constantinople."

"There is—there is no bad news in your letter?" exclaimed Theodora, as a sudden fear thrilled her.

"Oh, no, child! no, the best of news! especially to this family; but you see, I thought maybe you had got it already, and so it would be Piper's news, like the field of Flodden; then again I thought maybe you hadn't heard, because so many letters get lost."

"Well! well! but the news!" exclaimed several.

"Ay, ay, it is astonishing, Mrs. Wildman, that I should be the very first to tell you that your grand-daughter, Helen, is married to the young heir of Mount Storm!"

"Helen! Helen married, and never said one word to us

about it!" exclaimed Mrs. Wildman, her emotions divided between joy at the good fortune that had befallen her niece and mortification at the supposed slight that had passed over herself.

"Just like her! I am sure, the artful huzzy. She plotted to get him, and now that she is a great lady you'll see how much she cares for you, that's all!" remarked the amiable Miss Nelly.

Theodora had started and turned very pale; but at the same time she put out her hand to Basil, who was seated by her side, and who, struggling with the jealous pang that seized his own heart nevertheless, folded that delicate hand in his own, and whispered his consolation—

"Never mind, dear love! never mind! it will make no difference in Heaven!"

"Ah, Basil, you are so good—so good. Oh! whatever becomes of me, may you in Heaven find your own dear Eve, whom you shall love better and more happily than you have ever loved me! and who shall love you in kind."

"You are the only Eve I ever think of—never mind—let that pass, dear! I see it pains you still."

While this whispered conversation was going on, the other members of the circle were still commenting upon the news of Helen and Austin's marriage.

"And what did Mr. Wakefield say about it?" inquired Miss Elizabeth.

"Why, not much! You see, his letter was mostly filled up with other things—and then he says—speaking of the marriage—stop! I'll read you what he says;" said the widow, taking the letter from her pocket, unfolding it, and commencing—"And now I have some astounding intelligence for you. Helen Wildman and Austin Malmaison are to be united in the holy bonds of matrimony on the first Tuesday in the ensuing November, so that by the time this letter reaches you, they will have completed their honey-

moon. I have seen this affair coming on for some time—and so also I think has Miss Laglorieuse. Though I do not feel the least at liberty to conjecture what that lady's thoughts might have been, as she has never done me the honor of conversing with me upon the subject. Nor, indeed, did I feel free to allude to this impending marriage until now that the engagement has been formally announced. After the wedding, we shall all proceed to Constantinople—thence to Alexandria and Cairo—thence to parts unknown. Therefore, if after this, letters come irregularly, do not feel anxious, nor be in despair if they seem to cease altogether, for we are going into the desert places of the world, where post-offices are unknown, and mail-routes unheard of."

"But there!" said the widow, "I am getting into other portions of the letter! And now, that is all he said about the marriage. Joyful event, is not?"

"To think Helen should never o' said the first word to me about it!"

"'Cause she wan't sure of it herself, until he popped the question, and then she snapped him right up before he could back out! that's the reason!" kindly explained Miss Nelly.

"You forget, dear mother, that we haven't had a letter for five weeks. And I did not go to the post-office yesterday, and so it is very likely that there are letters from Helen and from Austin waiting there for us," said Basil.

"Dear me! I wish I knew! I'd send Jim to Eyrie this very afternoon, only the road is so dreadful; and besides, he has got such a cold, that he is not able to be out of bed."

"Never mind, I shall go, mother."

"No, you must not! Don't think of it, Basil! The road between here and Eyrie is really awful!"

"It don't matter, mother. You are anxious to hear, and

so am I—therefore I shall go. I can ride Kit, she is tolerably sure-footed."

The short winter afternoon was running to its close. Basil arose, and went out to catch his horse preparatory to the ride to Eyrie. Mrs. Brunton got up and said that it was late, and that she "must be getting on toward home."

"And indeed you must not, but you must stay and get a cup of coffee before you go. Supper will soon be ready," said old Mrs. Wildman, rising, and—without waiting for her visitor to decline—walking out into the kitchen to hasten the meal.

"Now just to think!" exclaimed Mrs. Brunton, looking helplessly after her vanished hostess—"And I really *can't* stay! I can't *indeed!* It is time now that I was half way home."

"Oh! sit down, Mrs. Brunton. You must never think of taking that long, cold ride without having a cup of coffee to fortify you before you set forth; and my sister will not be long in getting it," said Miss Elizabeth.

"But, my child, it is a great deal too early for your supper; and as for me, I ought to be half way home now."

"Oh! you would never hurt Grandmother Wildman's feelings, by going away without tasting her coffee," said Theodora, gently removing the visitor's bonnet, and placing it on the shelf.

"It is so late, I ought to be home this precious minute," exclaimed the widow, uneasily, as she sat down, and yielded the point.

"It isn't so late as you think; the sun's in a cloud: can't you see? I think old folks like you ought to wear specs!" said Miss Nelly Parrot, really desirous of the guest's company, yet constitutionally unable to give a pleasant invitation.

"A cloud! a cloud!" cried the widow, catching up this

word in alarm; "a cloud, did you say? Dear, bless me, I must be going, then, sure enough!"

"Yes! there *is* a cloud, Mrs. Brunton; and now that I look at it, I think it an additional reason why you should remain where you are. I think we are going to have more snow, and that it will begin to fall before you could possibly reach home," said Miss Elizabeth, who had gone to the window, thrown up the shutter, and now stood looking out.

Theodora, Mrs. Brunton, and Miss Nelly hastened up to take a view for themselves, and form their own opinions.

The prospect was certainly a threatening one, the window looked out to the north-west, where behind Mount Storm a great dark cloud, looking still darker in contrast to the moss-covered cliff, was slowly rising.

"There is wind in that cloud," ventured Theodora, as an opinion.

"And hail, and snow also," said Miss Elizabeth.

"I, for my part, never saw snow in a cloud as dark and moist looking as *that*," declared Miss Nelly.

"Here, give me my bonnet, children, I must be going! Indeed, I must," exclaimed Mrs. Brunton, in a panic, as she found and tied on her drab felt.

"My patience alive, you ain't a thinking o' starting with such a cloud as this arisin'?" exclaimed Mrs. Wildman, as she entered the sitting-room.

"Yes, indeed, I must fly! Good-by, Mrs. Wildman! Good-by, children!" replied Mrs. Brunton, who flattered all unmarried ladies, of whatever age, with this compliment to their juvenility!

Mrs. Wildman followed her to the door, never ceasing to reiterate her invitations until her departing guest had mounted her mule, and started off in a brisk canter. Then her attention was arrested by Basil, who came into the yard, leading his horse already saddled and bridled.

"And where are *you* off to this time of the afternoon?" inquired the old lady.

"Don't you know, mother? To the post-office."

"Now I hope you won't attempt any thing of the kind! Do you see that cloud?"

"Yes, mother, it is a wind cloud—it will soon blow over—it will be over by the time I swallow a cup of coffee and get off," answered Basil, securing his horse, and then hurrying into the house. In the sitting-room he found only Miss Elizabeth, who was laying the cloth for supper. Therefore without pausing he hurried up stairs to the presence of Theodora, whom he found standing at the gable window looking out upon the stormy sky.

"That is a magnificent aspect! Do but come and observe it, Basil."

He went up to the window and stooping over her shoulder looked out. It was indeed a grand and awful sight. The sun was setting behind the great cloud that extended from north to south along the western sky, like some black range of mountains, with their peaks ablaze, while the lengthened shadow darkened all the earth with a premature night.

"You never paint now, Theodora! You never have painted since you have been in this house," said Basil in a tone of regret.

"No," replied Theodora, with a half-suppressed sigh.

"But why, dear, when you are so fond of it? why?"

"When I *was* so fond of it you mean. I have never been so since—since my illness. If I ever had any real genius for art, I think I must have lost it in that spell of illness. I have never felt either the will or the power to paint since that time."

"That is since you came into this house, Theodora!"

"No! since my illness *only*—health does affect such power—but I think I should like to paint a storm piece.

And if I can carry the picture of this sky in my mind until to-morrow, I think I shall set up my easel and attempt it."

"How I do wish you would, daughter! if I could see you only once again interested in your old pursuits, I should be better contented, because I should think you would be happier."

"Don't feel anxious about me, dear Basil. I am getting better every day, and of course cheerfulness will return with health."

"Supper!" called the homely voice of old Mrs. Wildman at the foot of the stairs. "Come! come, my dear! come down to supper! I have to go to the post-office afterward."

"To Eyrie? No! do not think of it! Basil! Do but look at that cloud! You will be caught in the storm!"

"I have been looking at it, daughter! And it does not seem to me to rise as fast as I thought it would—there is not yet a breath of wind, and it seems now to be stationary. I should not wonder after all if it passed off harmlessly," said Basil, leading the way down into the lower room where the family were gathered around the supper-table. Basil gave himself only time to swallow a cup of coffee before he started up to set forward on his ride. In vain his mother and his aunt expostulated with him; he was firmly resolved upon the jaunt. "If an old woman like Mrs. Brunton sets off to ride ten miles, surely I can ride there and back!"

"Yes! but if Mrs. Brunton was to run her own head into the fire, would you do the same?" asked the old lady.

Basil laughed at this method of argument, and bidding them all good-night for the present, he hurried out and mounted his horse. He had just settled himself in his stirrups and turned from the horse-block, when Theodora, who had fluttered silently like some crippled bird to his side, now laid her slight clasp on the bridle.

"Basil, don't go."

"Why? why not, daughter?" inquired the young man, pleased with her interest in himself.

"Oh! because of the rising storm."

"But the storm will not be up these three hours. I shall be back before half that time has passed."

"Basil—don't go," repeated Theodora very earnestly.

"You want letters from Vivia, and—your other absent friends, I am sure you do; and I feel persuaded that there are letters waiting for us there, which you shall see before I sleep."

Theodora lifted her eyes to the cloud, and then turned them upon her companion. She was very pale, and her voice was unnaturally deep and tremulous when she said,

"Basil! I beg, I entreat you, do not go out to-night."

"My little daughter what makes you so serious?"

"I do not know!—the storm!"

"Pooh! that cannot be! You are very nervous, that is all! The storm? why, my child, even if it overtakes me, which is not likely, I am not soluble in water! and therefore not likely to be melted in the rain! I shall be home again in little more than an hour. Good-by, dear love," said the young man, holding out his hand.

Some vague but solemn prevision—some deep, mournful impulse compelled her to cling tightly to that rough, honest hand, and to gaze up into those candid, affectionate eyes that were fixed so pleadingly on hers, and then to put up her lips, offering, for the first and last time in her life, the kiss that made him happier than a benediction, as he said,

"God bless you, little daughter. Good-by!" and rode away.

As Theodora turned to go into the house a sudden gust of wind rushed through the pines, sent herself scudding on, and blowing open the door, entered before her.

"Dear me! you had better stayed out altogether than to

have brought the storm in with you!" grumbled Miss Nelly Parrott, crouching into the corner.

"The storm is up, sure enough," said Mrs. Wildman, as the wind, shut out by the door, roared and raved around the walls of the house—"how I wish Basil could have been persuaded to stay home."

"Humph! 'willful man will have his way'—*he* wanted his liquor! and his game of all-fours! tell me! *I'm* not to be deceived! And it will serve him right if he is caught in a storm," snapped Miss Nelly.

"Don't unnecessarily agitate yourself, my amiable friend," said Miss Elizabeth. "As yet there is only wind, and as that is against Basil's back, we may say it is a fair wind, which only helps him along faster."

"My gracious! but it is right in poor Mrs. Brunton's face and eyes—how upon the face o' the yeth will she ever get along?" ejaculated Mrs. Wildman.

"Humph! for my part I am of opinion that those who are out of the house, will get along much better than those who are in it! I'm sure any body ought to be paid for living here at the risk o' their lives! Old barn! just feel how it rocks—for all the world like a cradle."

Here a sudden blast of wind burst open the door with such violence that the carpet was blown up, and inner doors and windows banged to, and it took the united strength of Mrs. Wildman and Miss Elizabeth to close and hold the door, while Miss Nelly Parrott slipped the iron bars through the staples to secure it. And then, as they returned to their seats, the wind died away for a few minutes, and then arose with a fierce shower of hail, that, like a storm of bullets, rattled upon the windows! And how the doors shook, and how the house rocked in the blast! Suddenly peering through the duller noises of the storm, sounded a shrill human voice—

"Open! open, for the Lord's sake!"

Miss Nelly Parrott, impelled by curiosity, was the first to rush to the door and open it—when, to the astonishment of all, Mrs. Brunton fled into the house, as if the demon of the storm pursued her.

"Goodness gracious alive! the wind was against me, and the hail met me before I was a mile on my way, and I had to fly back as fast as I could."

"Come to the fire, for goodness sake! You are all over sleet!" exclaimed old Mrs. Wildman, relieving the traveler of her gray serge cloak and felt bonnet, and seating her in the warmest corner of the hearth, while the other women, exerting all their strength against the power of the storm, once more forced to and secured the door. "Light the candle, Betsy, it is as dark as midnight here now," said old Mrs. Wildman, "and I can't see to pour out a cup of coffee for Mrs. Brunton."

"Lor'! child, never mind me," interrupted the latter—"I couldn't eat or drink a morsel! It does seem a tempting of Providence to be attending to creature comforts, with such a storm as this howling around the house—merciful heaven! what was that?" she suddenly broke off and exclaimed, as a terrific crash smote the house.

All simultaneously started up, and gazed upon each other in terror—while the house still trembled under the shock. At last—

"It is that old Lombardy poplar that has fallen and struck the gable end," said Miss Elizabeth—"it must have injured the roof very badly. We shall be inundated if it has."

They all sat down, pale, trembling, helpless, while the storm increased in violence.

"Where is Mr. Wildman? Surely he did not go out, after all?"

"Yes, he did, Mrs. Brunton, just about fifteen minutes after yourself."

"Oh, Miss Elizabeth! do you think that he can have reached Eyrie yet?"

"Yes, my dear Theodora, I have no doubt he got there before, or just about the time the hail began to fall."

"He cannot get back to-night?"

"Of course not, my dear; he will not attempt it."

"Oh indeed I hope not."

The candles were now lighted; and Mrs. Wildman poured out a cup of coffee for her guest, who, seated at the table, was eating her supper, under protest, while the storm beat against the old house, and at every fresh blast the old timbers strained and cracked, as if at the next gust they must give way altogether.

An hour passed by, and still there was no abatement in the fury of the tempest. But through all its other noises—through the howling and shrieking of the wind, and the rattling of the sleet, and the crash of falling timbers, was heard a sound more awful than all others—one continual, thunderous roaring—it was the voice of Mad River, augmented by a hundred mountain torrents, and swollen to a flood.

"Good heaven! if Basil should be on his way back, and attempt to cross that river!" exclaimed Theodora, in a sudden panic, that communicated itself to all around her, except to Miss Elizabeth, who held to her first opinion, and said—

"Never fear, my child! Rash as he is, Basil would never attempt to cross the mountain and the river through such a storm as this."

"No, indeed, never!" added Mrs. Wildman, by way of reassuring *herself* as well as Theodora.

Midnight arrived, and still the storm raged with undiminished fury, while the thunderous roaring of Mad River now rendered conversation almost impossible. The family were cowering around the fire. The fuel that had been

brought in for the supply of the night, was now exhausted, and the violence of the storm precluded the possibility of obtaining more.

"Children! I think we had better all of us go to bed," said old Mrs. Wildman.

"Dear me!" shuddered her visitor—"to go to bed in such a storm as this, would seem like a braving and a defying Providence!"

And so the other members of the little circle seemed to think, as they drew their shawls closer around them, and cowered lower over the dying embers.

But after the climax of midnight the storm began gradually to subside. And in another hour, as the wind had fallen, and the fire was out, and the room cold, Mrs. Wildman's recent proposal, that they should all retire to bed, was received with more favor, and after a few minutes they all separated for the night.

Mrs. Brunton was put into Helen's vacant chamber, which was upon the same floor with Theodora's, and divided from it only by a narrow passage.

Theodora could not compose herself to rest. She shut the chamber-door, set the light into the empty fire-place, and then opened the little gable-end window to look out at the weather. The first object that met her touch was the leaves and branches of the fallen poplar tree that had been blown down against the roof, and now lay leaning to the left of the window. The wind had entirely died away; but the clouds were still heavy overhead, and the snow and sleet was falling steadily. And now no sound was heard but the deafening roar of Mad River.

"He will not surely attempt to return to-night," she said to herself, vainly striving to conquer the anxiety that preyed upon her heart, keeping her from the possibility of sleep—an anxiety that she could scarcely support alone, and yet which she did wish again uselessly to communicate

to others. She closed her window, undressed herself, said her prayers, put out her candle, and went to bed, but not to sleep.

Meanwhile all the household were at rest.

Mrs. Brunton in her room, across the little passage, in the other gable, had covered herself up snugly in bed, and, lulled by the roaring of Mad River that came deadened through the walls and closed shutters, she had fallen into a deep and dreamless sleep, which had continued for an indefinite time, when she was suddenly startled out of it by a piercing shriek from the adjoining room. She sprang from her bed in an instant, and stood shivering in a panic of fear, and of cold, for some minutes before she could recover herself and collect her scattered senses. Then she went to Theodora's room, rapped gently at the door, pushed it open, and entered. And she saw Theodora in her white robes standing, ghost-like, in the darkness of the room.

"My dear child, what was the matter? Did you have the nightmare? Did any thing frighten you?"

"Hush! Speak lower, Mrs. Brunton! I hope I did not wake up any one else with my scream!"

"No, child, I do not think you did—they are too far off—but the partitions are so thin between your room and mine."

"Yes," said Theodora, going to the mantle-piece, and scraping a match and lighting a candle.

"Good heaven! you are as white as a corpse! and might be one but for your trembling! My dear child, what upon earth is the matter! You frighten me nearly out of my senses only to look at you!"

"Sit down here by me, and I will tell you!" said Theodora, replacing the lighted candle upon the mantle-piece, and resting herself upon the side of the bed.

Mrs. Brunton, with her eyes distended with wonder, placed herself by Theodora's side.

"What was it now, my dear?"

"A dream, a vision, a reality—I know not what! But as I lay here with my eyes closed, unable to sleep, I suddenly heard what seemed to be the refrain of a song, sung by a chorus—and as if in singing they had passed by, and passed out of hearing—"

"Dear me! did you make out the words?"

"Only one—the refrain of the vanishing chorus, was, 'Free! Free!'"

"What a strange, unaccountable thing!" exclaimed the widow, incredulously; "it *must* have been a dream!"

"Listen further. Simultaneously with the sound of the vanishing chorus, I opened my eyes, and there I saw, as plainly as I ever saw him in my life, Basil Wildman, pale as death, and dripping wet, like one freshly come from a struggle in the waves! I thought it was himself wet and weary from the storm, and the passage of Mad River, and I started up to speak to him, when the arm was stretched out with a benignant and a valedictory gesture, as the vision vanished from sight. Then it was that I shrieked! And all this, from first to last, passed in an instant!"

"It was a dream, child! a remarkably distinct dream! that was all," said Mrs. Brunton, shuddering, in spite of her own incredulity.

"Perhaps it was. Listen! What o'clock was that?"

"It struck three."

"The night is far advanced! oh, how I wish it was morning."

"Try to sleep, child."

"Oh! I cannot, Mrs. Brunton; I am sick with nervousness. But do you go."

"Oh no, I have had my sleep out, honey. I will not leave you," said the kind woman, as she took a blanket from the bed, and wrapped Theodora in it.

Theodora then bowed her head, and buried her face in her own lap.

Mrs. Brunton wrapped herself in another blanket, and sat down, and so they remained until the first faint gray dawn of morning.

As Mrs. Brunton raised her head and perceived the pale gray dawn faintly penetrating the chamber, she arose, walked to the mantel-piece, turned the dimly burning tallow candle down into its socket, and then went and opened the window-shutters to admit the light of day.

Theodora got up and went to her side, and they both looked out.

The scene baffled description. The neighborhood was almost unrecognizable. The face of the country was changed. They seemed to have been in one night transported to the polar regions. The parallel north and south ridges of mountains enclosing the valley, were the only steadfast and familiar features in the scenery. And even they were, in form and appearance, modified by avalanches of snow, drifted upon hills of torn and broken forests. The valley between them was broken up into huge artificial rocks, and ravines of ice and snow. And Mad River running through the midst of these, roared and raged beneath its prison walls of ice, like some caged wild beast. So appeared the whole face of the country. Nearer the homestead, every pathway between the dwelling-house and outbuildings was blocked up by great heaps of drifted snow. Beside the window through which these women gazed, lay the fallen monarch of the grove, the huge poplar-tree, supported by the roof of the house, and supporting in its turn an avalanche.

"Whew! a bad look out!" exclaimed the widow, closing the window, quickly, after an instant's view.

"You must content yourself to stay with us a week at least, Mrs. Brunton," said Theodora.

"I do not know but you are right, my child! There never was such a climate as ours! one can never put the least confidence in the weather!"

"But we can do our best to accommodate ourselves to its exigencies. And so, as we have no fire, we must hasten to dress. By-the-way, Mrs. Brunton, do not speak below stairs of my strange dream; it would, perhaps, increase the anxiety of the family."

"No, surely not! Are you cold, or are you nervous, child, that you shake so?"

"Both, I believe. I do not feel so fearful now that day has returned; but, oh!—"

"What?"

"Nothing! I won't tempt misfortune by cowardice."

They dressed in haste, and went down stairs. One of the negro boys had plowed his own body through the drifted snow, to bring wood to the house, and had made a large fire in the sitting-room, where, (as the old kitchen was rendered untenantable by the weather,) Mrs. Wildman was preparing breakfast, while Miss Elizabeth was setting the table.

"My patience alive, children! did you ever see sich weather as this? Basil won't be able to get back to-day, nor to-morrow nyther, I'm thinking! However, ef it wasn't for being uneasy about him, I shouldn't mind it, seeing there is nothing can be done on the farm now," said the old woman, setting a hot loaf of bread on the table.

"But there is no cause of uneasiness, Mrs. Wildman," said Theodora, anxious to reassure herself.

"No—there's no *rale* cause, I s'pose; but you know what human natur is, child! it can't never be satisfied unless it *sees*. But, pshaw! there *aint* no cause; Basil aint a fool! He never would have started to come back such a night as last night," concluded the old woman, as she set

the last dish upon the table, and called the family around her.

After breakfast, Theodora took her place at the window that commanded the way toward Eyrie. I said "way," for the steep and narrow bridle-path, and the broad winding road above, was now entirely obliterated, and so changed was the side of the mountain, with its torn forests and drifted snows, that it was difficult to recognize the exact locality of that path and road.

"The earth really looks as if it were resolved back into original chaos," said Theodora to Miss Elizabeth, who came to her side.

"In my long life I remember but one such a storm. It was nearly fifty years ago," replied Miss Elizabeth, as she sat down and took up her work-basket.

Theodora essayed to help her as usual, but the burden of anxiety pressing her heart, rendered every second of passing time, and every stich of needlework, tedious beyond measure.

The temperature of the atmosphere had considerably moderated, and toward noon a thaw had set in.

"If it keeps on this way the snow will soon run off," remarked old Mrs. Wildman, who, by way of helping to pass a heavy day, was carefully dressing a turkey for dinner.

Through all the afternoon and evening it continued to thaw. The melted snow-drifts from the mountain sides ran down in torrents, plowing new ravines in their resistless course. The banks of ice along the margin of Mad River were broken up, and that stream, fearfully augmented by the new tributaries from the mountains, overflowed its bed and flooded all the valley, carrying devastation and ruin in its course.

The whole group of the Red Ridge building was placed far above any danger from the flood; but from their point of safety the family watched with the deepest commiseration

the destruction going on below them. As the waters arose they covered first the fences and low land-marks, next small cabins and cottages of one story in height, then taller dwelling houses, barns, stables and so forth, until the valley was submerged, and over it rolled an inland sea whose shores were the encircling mountains.* Over the surface of this water floated fragments of the wreck—small cabins buoyed up like boats, articles of household furniture borne out upon the waves, tables, settees, cradles, sideboards, etc., floated on with the struggling and drowning forms of horses, cows, and sheep.

"Old as I am, never have I seen such a flood as this—never!" cried old Mrs. Wildman in dismay. "'Lisabeth, child, there's an old spy-glass in the back loft. Do go and bring it and let us try if we can see what has become of the people."

Miss Elizabeth obeyed, and the old instrument was cleaned and adjusted, and Theodora, as having the youngest eyes, was placed at the look-out. Groups of men, women, and children were then seen toiling for life upon the mountain side toward the refuge of the convent—in another direction other groups were making the best of their way up to Mount Storm—and besides these—still others unseen, because concealed by the declivity of the mountain, were toiling up the steep to Red Ridge. All these had doubtless made their escape before the waters reached a height to render escape impossible. Theodora turned the glass, sweeping the whole expanse of waters before resigning her point of view.

"I think that the people must all have escaped," said Theodora, laying down the glass.

"Lord grant it!" and "Amen," responded the others.

It was growing too dark to resume the use of the spy-glass, and so that instrument was restored to its place, and

* Those who have seen the spring floods of Harper's Ferry, and other such places, will recognize this picture.

the troubled family circle gathered once more around their hearth.

Scarcely had they composed themselves, however, when a bustle in the yard, followed by a knock at the outer door, arrested their attention, and announced an arrival. Theodora ran and opened the door, and found some half-dozen of their poorer neighbors, refugees from the flood, wanting admittance.

Succor was most affectionately given them. Fresh fuel was thrown upon the fire; the warmest seats by the hearth were offered, and the table set; and all this was done amid the warmest expressions of sympathy.

The news the visitors brought went no further than to confirm the previous observations of the family. The flood, they said, had been very destructive, carrying away property and drowning cattle; but as far as they knew destroying no human life.

"And where is Mr. Basil?" at length inquired one of the refugees.

"Ah! he went to Eyrie yesterday afternoon, and has been kept there by the storm and the flood ever since. I hope he will be able to get home to-morrow," replied old Mrs. Wildman.

But now that her guests had warmed themselves, the state of their clothing required attention. They were wet and muddy above the knees. And Miss Elizabeth conducted them up stairs and supplied them with clean and dry clothing, which they put on while Mrs. Wildman below stairs prepared for them a comforting meal.

After supper the family and their guests gathered around the hearth—no one could think of going to bed or to sleep.

Toward morning the waters began to subside. The ebb was rapid. At sunrise the watchers looking out saw that the higher grounds of the valley were already bare though

desolated, and that the flood was fast returning toward the channel of Mad River. The destruction of property they knew must be immense, though the precise amount of loss had yet to be ascertained.

Returning from their look out, the watchers were prevailed upon by old Mrs. Wildman to lie down and take some rest, while herself and Theodora remained to prepare breakfast for their now large company.

"Can Basil possibly return to-day, do you think?" inquired Theodora of the old woman.

"Indeed, it is hard telling, child. The roads must be half leg deep in mud in some places—if there was to come a freeze now, the traveling mightn't be so bad," replied Mrs. Wildman, bustling about in her preparations.

In the course of an hour the room was put in order and the breakfast made ready. Theodora went up stairs to summon the family, but returning reported that all their friends, worn out with watching, were fast asleep, and advised that they should not be wakened. Therefore the old woman and the young one took each a cup of coffee, which having drank, they sat down to wait the walking of their guests.

The house was so still that old Mrs. Wildman, exhausted with her long vigil, began to nod, whereupon Theodora arose and closed the shutters, darkening the room, and then returned to her seat. The aged woman was soon fast asleep in her easy-chair. And, Theodora, notwithstanding the vague and rather unreasonable anxiety that troubled her, began to feel the influence of slumber stealing over her senses. But as often as she sunk into sleep she was startled out of that state by a strange shock of remorse and alarm, as irrational as it was incomprehensible and uncontrollable. When this had occurred several times, she became so nervous as to be unable to sit still.

She arose quietly and looked at the clock—it was very

late in the forenoon. Mrs. Wildman still slept. She went softly up the stairs and listened. Her visitors gave no signs of waking. The unaccountable feeling of gloom and terror that oppressed her spirits, grew almost intolerable. She was returning down stairs when a knocking at the outer door arrested her attention and quickened her footsteps. She hurried down with the vague impression that some other homeless victim of the flood needed shelter. She opened the door to find there only their own boy Jim, while at an angle of the house, a group of strange negroes, with frightened looks, gathered around some object that their forms concealed. Jim's own face was ashy gray with fear, or it might be with illness, for he had but just left his bed.

"Why, Jim, my boy, you ought not to be up; but what is the matter?"

"Oh, Miss Teodora! please go in and ax Miss Lis'abet' to come here."

"Miss Elizabeth is very tired, and has gone to sleep—why will not I do? Do those poor people want food and shelter?" she asked kindly, stepping out.

Jim raised both hands to prevent her.

"Oh! Miss Teodora! dont you go there! not you! not you!"

Theodora turned very pale through an accession of that unaccountable terror that now seemed about to be explained.

"Stand aside—let me go! what is it? what have those men there?" she breathlessly inquired.

"Miss Teodora! now, for the Lord's sake! oh, Miss 'Lisabet! I'm so glad you're come! 'Suade her to go in!" said Jim, as Miss Elizabeth unexpectedly joined the party, inquiring—

"What has happened, Jim?"

"Let her go in first, and I will show you."

"Go in, dear Theodora."

"No, Miss Elizabeth, I cannot. I must see the worst, once for all!" she replied, passing them, and hurrying toward the group.

They followed fast, and overtook her just as she reached the spot. The negroes, with grave and respectful looks, bowed, and moving to the right and left, gave way.

And there, in the midst of them, lay the dead body of Basil Wildman.

"My Lord! my Lord!" cried Miss Elizabeth, while Theodora, half-fainting, sank upon her knees beside the corpse.

A groan from behind fell upon Miss Elizabeth's ear, and turning, saw old Mrs. Wildman standing pale, tearless, and —after that first groan—perfectly silent, gazing upon her dead. At first, the shock had been too great to draw forth tears; but the mute despair of that aged woman melted Elizabeth's terror-frozen heart, and clasping her sister to her bosom, she wept bitterly, while still Theodora knelt by the side of the corpse, supporting its head on her bosom.

"Don't—it's no use, Betsy," said old Mrs. Wildman, releasing herself from her sister's arms; and then, turning to the negroes, she said—

"Take him up, children—gentle—there—gentle—and bring him in."

The compassionate and respectful assistants carefully obeyed this order, and following Mrs. Wildman, and accompanied by Theodora and Miss Elizabeth, conveyed the dead body into the house and up the stairs and into a chamber, where they laid it, for the present, on a bed.

All the guests of the house were now up, and, frightened and distressed at the tragic event that had come to their knowledge, gathered to the room of death to tender their services, if the case were such that these should be required.

Upon inquiry of the negroes, it was ascertained that, after the retiring of the waters, the body had been found by them near the banks of Mad River, where it had probably been cast by the flood, and where the clothing had been caught by the thorn-bushes among which it was thrown.

Upon subsequent investigation it was discovered that Basil Wildman, upon the night of his death, had reached Eyrie just at the commencement of the storm—that he had got letters from the post-office, and then, against the advice and entreaties of all his friends present, had set out on his return home, saying, poor fellow, in allusion to his old habits, that if the elements were going to have a night of it, it was no reason why *he* should do the same; that the weather would grow worse and worse until morning, and that the family would sit up and be anxious until he should return; finally, that he would get home in less than an hour, and did not mind exposing himself for that length of time to the storm.

The deduction from all the circumstances was, that upon the night of the tempest, Basil Wildman had been drowned in the attempt to cross Mad River.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE EXECUTION.

Oh, Thought! Oh, Memory! gems forever heaping
High in the illumined chambers of the mind;
And thou, divine Imagination, keeping
Thy lamp's lone star 'mid shadowy hopes enshrined;
How, in one moment, rent and disentwined
At some mysterious touch, apart they fall—
Your glorious combinations!—broken all!
As the sand-pillars by the desert's wind
Scatter'd to whirling dust!—*Hemans.*

SINCE the death of Basil, old Mrs. Wildman had sunk into a state of gentle apathy and helplessness, and there was none to take his place or hers upon the farm; unless, indeed, Theodora could find strength and skill for the duty. Elizabeth could not, at her age and with her nature, change the whole conduct of her life, and, from a sitting-room seamstress, become an agriculturist. Miss Nelly Parrott was efficient only in the art of insolent sponging. Thus three helpless old women were, in a manner, cast upon the care of Theodora, who, with her fragility and lameness, was in some respects the most helpless of all—her only advantage over the others being her possession of youth and non-possession of unchangeable habits.

Thus, as the winter advanced towards spring, and she missed the bustle incident to the season on the farm, and noticed the apathy of the aged mother and the quiet despondency of Elizabeth, it entered her mind that upon herself depended the salvation of this family from poverty and ruin. Then she took a general view of her own capabilities and of the resources of the place.

For herself, from having lived all her life in the country, she possessed some knowledge of agriculture, gathered from involuntary observation, and she had good-will and good sense enough to improve this knowledge. She was very delicate in organization, it is true, but then she was not ill, and though her motion in walking was still that of a crippled bird, she moved without difficulty or pain.

As for the farm, the field of wheat sown before Christmas was growing finely. There was one yoke of oxen and one draught horse—the other horse having been drowned with his master. Of farm laborers there were but two—Jim and another younger boy. There were, besides, an aged man and woman, long superannuated, and living now upon the bounty of their owners. Jim was the only efficient aid upon whom Theodora could depend. But she wished not to undertake any thing in her inexperience without consulting Mrs. Wildman. So, one day, when the snow had all disappeared, she said to the old woman:

"Well, Mrs. Wildman, what do you want done on the farm?"

"Nothing, child—it don't matter."

"Shall Jim plow the brook field?"

"It don't matter, honey."

"Shall he plow up the clover field and prepare it for planting corn?"

"Never mind."

"I know it is a great deal too early to sow corn yet, but we might get the ground ready, unless there is something else that ought to be done first—is there?"

"What, honey?"

"Any thing that ought to be done before we plow those two fields?"

"Lord, child, it ain't no use—nothin' ain't!" said the old woman, quietly, almost complacently composing herself.

"Yes! you may say that! but I wonder how you think

we are all going to live? If I called myself the head of a family, I wouldn't sit there smiling like an idiot, and letting people want for bread!" exclaimed Miss Parrott.

"It's all one, Nelly," replied the old lady very meekly.

"All one, is it?—'tisn't all one! I do believe you're getting into your dotage," snapped Miss Parrott.

Theodora seeing that old Mrs. Wildman was no longer able even to give advice and direction, was fain to take counsel with her poor assistant, Black Jim. And thus under not very favorable auspices the spring work on the farm was commenced. She had not counted upon all the difficulties that stood in the way. The family were in want of groceries, and as Theodora had not a dollar in her own possession she applied to Miss Elizabeth.

"Lord, child, *I* haven't a cent of money! Where should I get it? I haven't a single hand hired out! they are all on the farm."

"I know—but are there no funds in the house? I do not like to trouble Mrs. Wildman, because she is so—*absent-minded*—and just in proportion as she is brought to *think* she is brought to *suffer*."

"I know it, my dear! leave her alone; it would be useless, besides, for she has no money. It took every cent to pay for poor Basil's funeral, and left us in debt besides, I suppose."

"And there is really no money in the house?"

"No—I think we had better sell something—the yoke of oxen for instance."

Theodora was really shocked at this proposal, betraying as it did so much improvidence in the mind of her friend.

"But, Miss Elizabeth, to sell our sole yoke of oxen would indeed be the beginning of ruin! that is not to be thought of for a moment."

"Well, child, I don't know any thing about out-of-door matters; but I *do* know the groceries are nearly all out, and

that there is no money in the house to get more. It is a great pity Basil threw away so much money going to the springs last summer. But he always would spend faster than he could make."

"Hush, don't reproach the dead. He never spent much on himself, or *spared* much from his friends. When did ever that rich, full heart understand the poverty of the pocket, and close itself against the demands of friendship or of charity?"

"That is true—but—it has left his family in great straits."

The grain was growing finely, promising a rich harvest, and upon this prospect, Theodora, seeing no other way of supplying the immediate and pressing necessities of the family, thought she would go to Eyrie and get credit for such articles as they most needed. So the draught horse was put in the old gig and Jim summoned to drive it. And thus she went to the village grocery store.

"I am glad to see you, madam. I was just about to send a messenger to Red Ridge, and your appearance has very agreeably forestalled my purpose," said the proprietor, bowing and handing a folded paper to his customer.

With a sinking heart Theodora opened it, and found it to be a bill for the last year's groceries, ending the preceding January. She looked at the foot of the long column of figures, and seeing the amount, could scarcely suppress a cry—it was over three hundred dollars.

"I will take this with me," she replied in a trembling voice.

"And—I should be very much obliged by an early settlement, madam. I have a large note to pay in a few days, and—"

"I fear I shall not be able to settle this account in time for your note, sir. In a few months I shall apply for letters of administration upon the estate of my deceased husband,

and then all claims shall be faithfully discharged," said Theodora. But with an unpaid bill like that staring her in the face, she had not courage to give an order for the supplies she needed.

Bidding the dissatisfied tradesman good-morning, she directed Jim to drive to the shoe store, where she had also some purchases to make on credit. Without leaving her seat in the gig, she sent in the measures by Jim, who, after an absence of fifteen minutes returned, bearing the packet of shoes, and accompanied by the shopkeeper, who bowing, presented his bill for the whole preceding year, saying,

"We generally send out bills on the first week of January; but delayed this upon account of the affliction of your family, ma'am."

"I thank you for your consideration, sir," said Theodora, growing paler as she received the account.

"Is it possible that the shoe-bill of a family of six white persons and four negroes, can amount to one hundred dollars a year, and their grocery-bill to three hundred? It is to me almost incredible; but then I am inexperienced, and consequently ignorant; I must look over the items." Then aloud, to the storekeeper she said, "Sir, I will pay you a portion of this bill at least, from the very first funds that come into my hands. In the mean time I do not wish to open a new account while the old one remains unsettled."

And Theodora handed back the packet.

The shoe merchant looked in her face to see the hidden cause of her unusual movement, and seeing nothing there but gentleness, sadness, and sincerity, he answered, kindly and respectfully,

"That does not make the slightest difference, Mrs. Wildman. Pray let your servant take charge of the bundle. I confidently relied on the continuance of your family's custom."

"Ah, sir!" replied the simple and unworldly Theodora,

"unless our affairs take a favorable change, our custom would not be a great profit, even if it were not a great loss. I had no idea how much we were in arrears until I came to town."

The creditor looked grave—but to *his* credit be it placed, that he did not fail either in humanity or delicacy.—Theodora soon took leave. There was a bottle of Stouten's Bitters wanted for the old lady, and Theodora drove around to the druggist to get with the medicine a long bill of the year's drugs.

"Twenty-five dollars! Jim! do you give calomel and quinine to the *cattle?*" she inquired of her factotum, on re-entering the gig.

"Law! no, Miss Teodory—surely not!"

"We, ten human creatures, Saxon and African, never could have swallowed the tenth part of this medicine, and in one year, and survive the effects."

"Hi! law! Miss Teodory, don't you know when any poor body comed to Marse Basil or Miss Lizzy, for 'sistance —and they hadn't no money—(as they ginerally hadn't—for what should a gentleman or a lady as has grocers, and druggers and all to command, want of money?)—they guv 'em *orders.*"

A light broke on Theodora's mind. Basil, with his usual reckless generosity, and undiscriminating charity, had been feeding and clothing others besides his own family.

Theodora wished next to go into the village dry-goods store to purchase on credit for Mrs. Wildman a much needed Sunday gown. But dreading to face another unpaid bill, she was leaving the village, when she found her precautions all in vain; for a young shopman came running out with flying hair and flying coat-skirts, and holding in his hand a fresh folded paper—hailed the driver of the gig.

Jim understanding the face of affairs, put whip to his horse with the intention of running away.

"Oh, Jim! Jim! never do that!" said Theodora, laying hold of the reins; "to the right about! face the enemy, Jim!"

"To hail we-dem in the public street!" exclaimed Jim, indignantly; and he jerked the reins so sharply and suddenly as to make the horse rear.

When the beast was quieted, the young shopman approached, and with many apologies, presented the account of his employer.

"I will attend to it as soon as possible," said Theodora, receiving the paper.

The young man bowed and retired.

"Two hundred and fifty dollars for dry-goods; three hundred and seventeen for groceries; one hundred and three for shoes; twenty-five for drugs. Nearly seven hundred dollars in all—to say nothing of other unpaid bills of which I may be yet ignorant. Jim! can you give a guess about what our crops will bring this year?"

"Law, Miss Teodory, nobody can't tell much about craps, ma'am, in March! 'Spose we had good, toler'ble wettish wedder, wid no 'stroyin' storms, and nyther no drout—we have good craps. 'Spose we have ither a long drout, or else sev'al 'structive storms, to say nothin' o' 'stroyin' wermin an' plagues o' Egypt, why you know yourself, it 'ould spoil all; and all our labor dead loss!"

"Yes! I know all that! but I trust in Heaven that none of these fatal casualties will happen. I mean if all goes on as well as usual; can you give a rough guess as to what will be the profits of the year? In a word—Jim, these bills that the shopkeepers—"

"The low-life, white nigers! as if they couldn't o' waited; I 'clare to Marster, I could hardly sit still on my seat and listen to 'em!"

"Hush, you forget yourself; you must not say such things, least of all in my presence. The men were respectful; I have no fault to find with them. I was about to say

to you, that the amount of their claims is nearly seven hundred dollars. Now do you think the profits of the farm will be much over that?"

"My goodness, Miss Teodory! I heard Marse Basil say how the place hadn't brought in five hundred dollars a year since he knew it!"

Theodora groaned in spirit, but then said aloud—

"A great deal of money was laid out upon it last year—therefore it *must* produce more this year. And yet, alas! I have known even such sure speculations as those to fail!"

They were winding down the mountain path, a descent not without danger, and so difficult as to require the greatest care on the part of the driver—and Theodora fell into silence that remained unbroken until the gig was drawn up before the farm-house.

"Well! well, my dear, what fortune?" inquired Miss Elizabeth, as Theodora entered the sitting-room.

The girl shook her head and smiled sadly as she sat down and drew off her gloves.

"'Went out for wool, and came home shorn?'" exclaimed the amiable Miss Parrott.

Theodora took no notice of spiteful speeches addressed to herself; but proceeded to take off her bonnet and shawl and put them aside.

"Well, honey," said poor old Mrs. Wildman, looking up from her corner; "well, my child, did you get the *rale* gun-powder tea? first quality, you know?—I can't drink poor stuff."

"No! she didn't get first quality! nor second quality! nor yet third quality! she couldn't even get trusted for 'poor stuff!' Serves her right, and you too! See what you've brought yourself to in your old days!"

"Ah! Lord; I have done the best I could, Nelly—and if it was all in vain—still I can bear it."

"You can bear it! Yes, *you!* you've a right to bear

it! but you've no right to bring innocent people like *me* to want! Where shall I get a cup of tea to-night, and to-morrow and next day—where?"

"In Bedlam, Miss Nelly!" said Theodora, quietly fixing the semi-maniac with her firm gaze.

"G-r-r-r-r—!" hissed Miss Nelly between a panic and a fury, showing her teeth and shaking her fists at Theodora, who very calmly received that graphic demonstration of feeling.

The nearest and, for the present moment, the most importunate care on the girl's mind was the old lady's supper. How could she ever make it without tea, that had become to the latter a real necessary of life.

"May there not be a teaspoonful remaining in the bottom of the caddy, that will do to make *her* a cup of tea? If there is only enough for her, we, you know, can do without it for to-night; to-morrow, I will find means of replenishing the grocery-closet," said Theodora to Miss Elizabeth, as she went to the cupboard, as bare as that of old Mother Hubbard, and turned up the tea-caddy. "Yes! I do declare, there is half an ounce left—enough to last her to-night and to-morrow morning, and I am as glad as if I had found a small fortune."

The next day Theodora once more put the services of Jim, the horse and the gig, in requisition, and went to Eyrie, to the shop of the watchmaker and silversmith, where she disposed of her own gold watch—the gift of Vivia—for a little less than its original cost. And then she went to the grocery store, and laid in a supply of groceries, telling the shopkeeper, as she settled for them, that she should prefer to purchase only with cash until the old bill should be settled.

"It was right. Vivia herself would be the first to approve the act. I must not let a morbid attachment to inanimate objects, gifts of love though they are, cause me to fail in love and care to those human beings looking to

me for comfort," said Theodora, sighing, and endeavoring to soothe the pain she felt in leaving behind the cherished gift of Vivia while she journeyed home.

The family were thus made comfortable for some months. Those among them who remained in ignorance of their embarrassments were comparatively happy. But Theodora, who had gradually acquainted herself with the amount of the liabilities of Basil Wildman's estate, found in old and new claims an accumulated sum of several thousand dollars. Creditors, to give them their due, are not generally a persecuting class—they are "more sinned against than sinning." Certainly the old creditors of the Wildman family had been patient for many years, some of them had even withdrawn their suits; but the death of the head of a family is always the signal for the rallying of claimants around the estate. Creditors must be expected to assist at the "cutting up." Therefore bailiffs and collectors, and also their principals and employers, were rather frequent apparitions at Red Ridge. Theodora always received them, taking upon her own sensitive and gentle heart the brunt and burden of all rude and humiliating encounters and interviews. The greater number of these unwelcome visitors were generally respectful, yet a few were *particularly* otherwise.

"In the d——l's name, madam! when is this account to be settled?" asked the rudest of this latter class, who, one morning in June, had frightened Theodora with a visit.

"I have told you, sir," she said, "that if our crops thrive I will pay you after harvest, and after we sell the wheat."

"If your crops thrive! Don't you know, madam, that the crops are perishing on the fields under this drought?"

"If that be so, sir, the worst that can happen to your claim, will be that it will lay over until the end of the year that the law allows us, when I shall take out letters of administration that will authorize me to sell a portion of the property to satisfy all just claims against the estate"

"We shall see, madam! we shall see!" exclaimed this man, clapping his hat upon his head, and leaving the room and the house.

Theodora had become accustomed to this species of insane anger and pointless threats; but she never could grow reconciled to the heartless and brainless brutality that instigated them. The arrival of such a visitor as the last, always shocked and terrified her, and his departure left her trembling and exhausted.

Alas! apparently from bad to worse tended the fortunes of the afflicted family of Red Ridge. I say "apparently," for it is a question whether in such visitations of sorrow, there is any *absolute* evil.

June ended, but the drought continued.

"Heaven help us, then," said the farmers, "if we do not have rain."

July came, and passed without even so much as a shower.

"If this weather continues, all our crops will be lost," they said.

August came and passed. The wheat crop had been ruined; but there was still a possibility of the late corn being saved.

"The Lord only knows what will become of us, if he does not send rain," said Theodora; and, in other words, many more anxious people besides her.

Oh! rain! rain! it was hoped for, wished for, called for in the homes, and prayed for in the churches! Oh! rain! rain! the poor panting cattle on the parched and calcined meadows, supplicated for it, in their mute suffering—in their choked and panting throats and dry, out-hanging tongues and haggard eyes! Oh! rain! rain! But it came not. And only He—the Infinite Wisdom—who formed this earth and knew her every unsearchable secret, knew also why he sent that long, long drought, and why it was necessary to bring up the deeply sunken powers of the earth,

which would afterward compensate one season of scarcity with many succeeding seasons of unprecedented abundance. The rain came not as yet; and the suspense, the trial, and the agony of the earth and her children went on. The dry and burning heat produced some of the worst effects of frost. The crops had perished; the leaves on the trees and bushes withered, dried up, and fell, leaving the stems and branches as naked in August as in mid-winter; the grass had withered from the fields, the very ground from which it sprung was dried to powder; rivers had shrunken to their channels, and many lesser streams were lost; many springs were entirely dry, and many more were at the lowest ebb of water, so scant and brackish as to create faster than it satisfied thirst.

"If the Lord should permit this state of the atmosphere to continue, more of us should die of thirst than famine," said Miss Elizabeth, turning with aversion from the saltish water she had just tasted.

"It will not last; it cannot last; our Lord is good; I feel sure this drought was necessary, without knowing why or wherefore. We cannot know all the mysteries of nature, and all the Divine system of economies in the creation and preservation of the earth, and their functions."

"But why do you think so, my dear? How can such a great and general calamity be for the good of the earth?"

"Just because it *was* a great general calamity sent by our Lord; and such as he would not send to be fruitless of final benefit—because I have the warmest, brightest faith in the perfect wisdom, goodness, and power of our Father."

Thus, by her loving faith, this unlearned girl had divined what the science of the chemist and geologist has since demonstrated—namely, that an occasional long and severe drought is necessary to draw the deeply sunken mineral fertilizers of the soil up to the earth's surface; and the

dreaded droughts, once superstitiously believed to be the visitations of wrath by an angry God, are now known as visitations of Divine love—features of Divine economy.

But however beneficial in its ultimate results, the drought was, in its immediate effects, very disastrous. The wealthiest farmers felt their losses sensibly; while the less wealthy were seriously distressed; and the poor were nearly ruined. Nor did the mischief stop with the agriculturists. Towns and villages draw their living from the country; farmers, disappointed in their crops, in their turn disappointed the struggling tradesmen and professional men of the villages—by omitting to pay old debts and making new cash purchases; these tradesmen in *their* turn failed to meet the notes held by importers and wholesale merchants of large cities; finally these, by the non-payment of the hundreds of country merchants, their customers, were unable to meet the claims of home and foreign manufacturers; and the effects of the drought, beginning with the farmers, was felt through the whole length and breadth of the land, and from the one extreme of the social scale to the other; it was felt from Maine to Louisiana—from Wisconsin to Florida; from the wealthy importer, with his fleets of merchantmen traversing the ocean, with his city palace and his country villa, and who experienced a temporary embarrassment for the want of a few hundred thousands, down to the poor seamstress in her little room, whose work and whose food fell short, because her customers were no longer able to purchase new clothing or to put out their needlework.

Our little valley of Mad River and village of Eyrie had their full share of trouble; the destruction of the crops had been complete; wheat, rye, oats, corn, and tobacco, had all been destroyed; the village shopkeepers' richest harvest was immediately after that of the farmers, who, upon the sale of their crops, always paid up old debts and made liberal cash purchases, and then opened new accounts. But

now that there was no harvest in the valley, there were no customers for the village—and the small tradesmen there, always with notes to pay, never free from the fear of insolvency, were now upon the brink of that commercial precipice.

If the late Basil Wildman's creditors now pressed his widow very cruelly, it was because they themselves were severely pressed. Theodora had but one answer for every one: "The crops have failed, as you see; early in the New Year I shall administer upon the estate and pay every debt; until then, I can do nothing." And as the law gave her this period for preparation, the most impatient among the claimants were forced to wait.

In the mean time the necessities of the family were supplied by Theodora. The sum from the sale of the watch had kept them in groceries for months; and when that was exhausted, a diamond ring, another gift of Vivia, was sold for half its value, and the money applied to the uses of the family; next a pair of bracelets followed; then a brooch; then a picture of Saint Genevieve at the siege of Paris, a relic of Theodora's old days of enthusiasm, that had escaped the marauding hands of the Thogmortons, was sold at the Seminary for a reasonably fair price. Thus, by the disposal of her own personal effects, she kept the family supplied with the necessaries and even the comforts of life, and that without contracting a single debt, until the close of the year. She might indeed have spared her own jewelry and supplied the family necessities by the sale of the old family plate; but this plate she respected as a portion of the estate, not to be disposed of until letters of administration gave her the legal authority to do so.

Early in January these necessary letters were taken out and the settlement of the claims commenced. Claims in all of several thousand dollars having to be satisfied, it became necessary to offer for sale a portion of the land. It

was surveyed and divided in half, and a day appointed for its sale at auction. The day came and many visitors also to see the sport, but none to bid for the land; thus the first auction failed, and a second day was appointed. Upon this occasion the auctioneer counseled Theodora to have some friend upon the spot to bid against any grasping and dishonorable person who might be inclined to take advantage of the circumstances to get the land for a merely nominal price, and thus, in fact, commit a legal robbery.

"That land," said Theodora, "has been valued at seven thousand dollars. Our debts are nearly four thousand. I am willing, in this emergency, that the property should go at much less than its real value; but if sold at all, it must be sold for a sum sufficient to cover all our debts."

Thus the counter bidder was engaged; and when the time appointed for the auction arrived, and the curious crowd gathered, and the land was put up, and the would-be purchaser began bidding, he was opposed by the other, who had been instructed to outbid him up to four thousand dollars. But the former saved the latter that trouble; he was perfectly willing to give a thousand dollars for land worth seven times as much, but when his opponent raised *his* bids to one thousand five hundred, the former ceased and left the spot; and the auction for the second time failed. A third day was appointed with no better success; a crowd collected, but no one bid over two thousand dollars; they seemed unable or unwilling, while times were so "hard," and money so "tight," to give more, while they soon learned that the land would not be permitted to go at that price. A fourth day was appointed and proved the most unlucky of all, for not a soul came to the sale. Then it was for the present indefinitely postponed. Meanwhile the smaller creditors were growing to be the most importunate. One morning, just after breakfast, Theodora was sitting washing up the tea-service, when she was sum-

moned to the parlor to see visitors. She arose trembling, and went, expecting to see some creditor; but when she opened the parlor door and saw within three very decent-looking strangers, who behaved with politeness, she felt reassured. He who seemed from an indescribable *prestige* to be the principal among them, now came forward and said gently and respectfully—

"Mrs. Wildman, I have a very painful duty to discharge here, which grieves me quite as much as it can any member of your family."

"What is it then, sir?" faltered Theodora, turning pale and sinking into the nearest chair. His next words informed her that it was an execution at the suit of Millard and Company, merchants, Eyrie.

"Proceed, Mr. Fenwick," said Theodora, rising weak, trembling, yet struggling hard to support this shock with dignity and self-possession.

She went into the sitting-room and beckoned Miss Elizabeth, and whispered faintly, "Get her up into her bedroom; amuse her, and keep her there."

"What—what is the matter?"

"Hush! be composed—it is an execution!"

"My Saviour!"

"Pray control yourself, and do as I tell you for her sake. See, she is watching us now. If this shock should fall upon her, it would kill her. Coax her up-stairs, where she shall be safe from intrusion. I must return to those men."

And while Miss Elizabeth, upon some pretext or other, conducted the most simple and docile of all aged children up the stairs, Theodora returned to the parlor, where the men were already at work valuing the furniture.

"Mr. Fenwick, there is one request I have to make of you. There is in a room above stairs an aged lady, the mother of this family, whose health is in the most precari-

ous state. She does not know the extent of our embarrassments, and to learn them to-day by means of this execution, would give her a fatal shock. Will you and your assistants respect her privacy?"

"Assuredly, Mrs. Wildman. We need not, and will not, set foot above stairs."

"I would entreat you, were it possible, to spare the furniture of the sitting-room and of the kitchen, which she sometimes enters. If it be necessary, you can empty the parlor and the drawing-room beyond, for those I can easily lock up; and as she never enters them, she need not know what has taken place."

"I will endeavor to follow your wishes, Mrs. Wildman."

The work progressed. The whole of the furniture of the two parlors was levied upon, and then, as the supply was insufficient to meet the demand, the farm-yard was visited, when the yoke of steers, the wagon, and one of the two cows, were confiscated. Then the steers were put to the wagon, the furniture piled up within it, the cow tied to the rear, and the whole team, driven by one of the subordinate officers, left the farm-yard. Then the sheriff took his leave.

"Thank the Lord," said Theodora, "for many mercies in the midst of judgment; first, that Miss Nelly Parrot providentially took it into her head this morning to go and spend the day where she would get a better dinner than we could give her, and that, therefore, she knows nothing of this affair; next, that the poor old mother's *real* home—the chambers, family sitting-room and kitchen—remains undisturbed; so that she need never suspect our misfortune. Then, that the milch cow is left, so that she need not miss milk from her tea; finally, that the old horse and gig remain to me, for they might as well or better have taken off my two feet as to have carried away them," concluded the poor lame girl as she fluttered back into the house, closed and bolted the shutters, and locked-up the doors of the

parlors, and then went to the foot of the stairs and called Miss Elizabeth, who quickly came down, exclaiming,

"Well? well?"

"Well! the Evil One is not as black as he is painted! You perceive that nothing is changed here?" Theodora said, smiling, and glancing round the sitting-room.

"What! did they take pity?"

"No, my dear aunt, they took live stock and the furniture of the two parlors. I will tell you more after awhile. Say nothing to Mrs. Wildman of this, but bring her down to the fire. I have to go to town."

So saying, the young woman went out into the farm-yard, cautioned the two boys against talking of the visit they had received, lest it should reach the ears of their old mistress, and directed Jim to put the horse to the gig to take her to Eyrie.

Then, while the boy obeyed her orders, she hastened up stairs and made herself ready.

"Drive fast, Jim," she said, as they started.

Her first visit was to her friendly counselor, the auctioneer, who was also a commission-merchant in Eyrie.

"I came to say to you that the land must be sold, Mr. Moore. There was an execution at the house to-day. And I am in hourly dread of another one that shall sweep away what the first has left."

"Let it be swept away—better that your household furniture should go, than that your land should be sold for a sixth of its value."

"Ah! but a life would be also imbittered and destroyed. You know what the days of old Mrs. Wildman have been—and that from her last affliction she has never rallied. She still, however, experiences a sort of serenity that I will not have fatally disturbed by the knowledge of our difficulties. Therefore let the land be sold, that she may finish her days in peace."

"That is reasoned like a very young woman. However, since you are resolved, I am at your orders. When shall the next auction take place?"

"I shall not put up the property again at auction. I see that people come upon such an occasion in the expectation of gaining a grand advantage and making a grand speculation, and they don't like to be disappointed in their permissible robbery, which makes me fear that human nature is generally at bottom dishonest; and which has so warped my opinion of mankind to the left, that I need somebody to do something very magnanimous now to restore the equilibrium. No, Mr. Moore, you are a commission-merchant, and I authorize you to offer the land at private sale. That, I believe, does not tempt the cupidity of purchasers. They expect to give something like an honest price."

"Very well, Mrs. Wildman; yet an auction is often the most advantageous method of sale."

"Yes, I know, when for instance the property is very desirable and the necessity for its sale not imminent; then emulation, the spirit of competition, another strong passion of human nature, overcomes cupidity and instigates rival aspirants to outbid each other, even to a degree above the real value of the property. But I have no time to talk longer with you, Mr. Moore, I have to see several of our creditors in town, and tell them of this intended sale, and prevail upon them to wait until it takes place, lest some among them, seeing the example set to-day, may follow it up by coming down on us with another execution to-morrow. Proceed with this affair immediately, if you please, Mr. Moore. Good-afternoon."

Mr. Moore placed his client in her gig, and bowed his adieu as she drove off.

Theodora's precaution was not unnecessary, and not, either, unavailing. She obtained the requisite delay, and returned home.

Mr. Moore advertised the land for sale in the county papers, and also, by a wise foresight, in the city and metropolitan papers. It was from the latter he hoped the most, and with the most reason, as the event proved.

A gentleman on the look-out for some fine spot for a country-seat, came from a distant city to see the agent and view the land, with which he was so well pleased, as finally to give five thousand dollars for its possession.

This sum satisfied all the creditors, and left a surplus of a few hundred dollars, a part of which was expended in the purchase of oxen and of horses to work the farm, and the remainder was laid up to keep the family until the harvest of another year should replenish their humble coffers.

And now the little farmeress applied herself with zeal and energy to make the most out of the land that still remained to them. Her success was a triumph of mind over matter; for very little co-operation could the poor little frail and crippled body afford the intellect, although it suffered with perfect patience and did its very best. It was more also than that, it was the triumph of reason and conscience over all the strongest loves and attractions of her heart.

Theodora did *not* like practical farming for its own sake; the personal supervision and direction of the negro boys sweltering at their work under the burning sun of summer; the inspection of pig-pens, and the scientific mixing of compost heaps, were certainly *not* beautiful and attractive occupations; even the milking of cows, and the making of hay, pastoral and poetical as these rural occupations are generally admitted to be, would not under other circumstances have had power, day after day, to draw her from the spiritual dreams of beauty that haunted and enchanted her soul. But not the less firmly did she resist this fascinating and seductive indolence, and give herself up to the good works of usefulness.

To rectify her inexperience and enlighten her ignorance, as

well as to avail herself of the newest theories and discoveries in the art of agriculture, she left an order with the village bookseller to send for the best books upon this subject, and these volumes when procured were studied in the leisure moments of the day and through the evenings, and were ever at hand to be referred to upon any occasion. Nearly all these books were written by practical agriculturists of England or New England; and if our zealous little farmeress read diligently it was that she might compare and then condense the best wisdom of the collection for the benefit of her own farm. She began to be interested in the study and the practical test of her knowledge. Thus the work, begun in loathing, and continued only from a sense of duty, grew by slow degrees attractive; and when the mysteries of the earth revealed themselves to her, the details of agriculture were no longer repulsive; even the compost heap, seen in its ultimate results of wonderful fertility, of fine crops of grain and grasses, garden vegetables and orchard fruits, was no longer an insufferable object.

"Who would ever have thought you would have made such a good little farmer?" said Miss Elizabeth one day to Theodora, as the latter came in from the field.

"Why?" inquired that young woman, smiling.

"Why, of course, because you never seemed to take the slightest interest in it."

"Until I was forced to do so!"

"Forced, my dear?"

"Well, impelled by a sense of duty. Dear Basil was very—yes, was even—excessively kind to me. The least and *all* I can do for him now is, to supply his place as well as I can to those he has left behind," said Theodora, with tears, born of a strange compunction in her heart; "strange," for Theodora had really nothing to reproach herself with upon Basil's account.

"Well, my dear, that may be all very natural. I am not surprised at *that*, but at the *interest* you take in every thing."

"The interest, Miss Elizabeth, has grown upon me. Hitherto I have been a dreamer, and only loved nature in her finished and beautiful effects; but I did not know, and therefore did not love her in her laboratory. But now, that I know and help her in her work; now that I co-operate with her, I love and venerate her more than ever."

Miss Elizabeth perhaps did not fully appreciate this sentiment; at all events, her next words were not a reply.

"That drought was a great draw-back to us all."

"Oh! well, sometimes it is necessary to *draw back* to get impetus for a vigorous, fresh start," said Theodora, smiling. Then she added seriously, "Now, whenever I think of that drought, and its effects upon all grades of society, I am deeply impressed with the relations of 'mother earth,' to us, her children. As sure as the Lord is the Father of the whole human family, the beautiful earth is our nursing mother, and when her bosom is dry, we, her children, starve. But we need not fear such a misfortune now; for this season promises to be one of unprecedented fruitfulness. All this I have found out while trying to supply dear Basil's place to his mother and her household as well as I can!"

"As well as you can, my dear; things never went on so well and orderly and prosperously before; no, not even in the old lady's best days, and with her best exertions."

"Ah, well! if it be so, it is partly owing to the great improvement in agriculture and agricultural tools of these latter days. And my easy success is mostly owing to—to—"

"Well, child, to what?"

"To the alterations and improvements a friend made here two years since."

"Mr. Austin Malmaison! I know; he had the barn

remodeled, and sent home a number of curious-looking machines."

"Yes, labor-saving machines, any one of which stand us instead of half a dozen men and horses, and so enable us to apply our resources to other needs of the farm."

"*Us*, child, why don't you say *me*, for you are singly the manager of the place."

"No—*us!* Don't you do all the housekeeping, while I do the farming, Miss Elizabeth?—and is not the old lady the proper head of the establishment? *Us*—certainly, *us*—I should die of solitude if compelled to say *me*."

Miss Elizabeth understood as little of this sentiment as of any of the preceding speeches, and I fear that, after all, in many things, Theodora was compelled to say "I" and "me" instead of "we" and "us." In nearly all her dearest thoughts and feelings she was alone. It was very well that she indulged no morbid cravings after "sympathy," which it was impossible in her circumstances to receive. Even her best and wisest measures on the farm were treated with distrust by the family, and with contempt by the neighbors; yet the former had no other chance than to risk their welfare in her hands, even while the latter shrugged their shoulders, called her a visionary, inexperienced girl, and prophesied the speedy and final ruin of the family. It remained for time to prove Theodora's worth. Inexperienced, indeed, she was, yet that very inexperience was not without its advantages; for if it left her without precedents, it left her also without the prejudices of custom-hardened and bigoted conservatives, so that her quick intelligent mind found no obstacle to oppose to the reception of new and enlightening ideas upon the subject to which she wished to devote herself.

When her grain was ripe for the harvest, and was found to be the finest in the county, the tone of the neighborhood sentiment, as far as she was concerned, was in some degree

changed for the better, and though some were still found who refused her any credit, and ascribed her good fortune to chance, by the repetition of the old adage—"A fool for luck," yet others graciously acknowledged that the little farmeress had done very well so far, if she should not yet, by some new-fangled whim and fatal experiment, spoil all. But Theodora did not spoil all. The crop was secured and afterward sold. And by its sale Theodora proved herself as clever in financiering as in farming.

"That is a wonderful little woman, that pretty little farmeress of Red Ridge," said one of her neighbors, who could not understand the metamorphosis of the miniature painter of Mount Storm into the scientific and successful agriculturist of Red Ridge, because they would not or could not perceive that intellect is a power not of *partial* but of *general* use, to be directed to the right or left, to literature, art, science, agriculture, trade, government, or any other branch of human effort and triumph by the mere decision of the will.

Intellect is originally a pure central power, unalloyed with prejudices and unbiased by circumstances. If, in the course of its development, it turn decidedly to one pursuit in preference, it is only because some affection within the heart has inspired it, while some corresponding object without has attracted it. Had Sir Humphrey Davy given his sole attention to politics, he would probably have attained as great eminence in *political* as he certainly did in *natural* science. Milton excelled in theology and moral philosophy, and would still have been celebrated in his prose works even had he never written his great poem. The late Dr. W——, the most eloquent and graphic thought-painter of the age, had he devoted himself to art instead of oratory, would have left instead of immortal books immortal pictures.

But we are wandering too far from our little painter turned farmer. A holy sense of duty inspired all her actions,

and in the new and real interest she found in her work, and in its beneficial effects upon the comfort and happiness of those dependent upon her, she found her consolation. Yet was not Theodora fully happy. That "virtue is its own reward" is not true, and it need not take one half a lifetime to find out that. If virtue—I use the word in its old classic sense of *heroic goodness*—if virtue was its own reward, then all the world would be virtuous on the spot—(poor human nature asks no better than to be happy)—and there would be little merit in it, and no more work for the preachers of the pen and the pulpit. Virtue is not by any means "its own reward," and to say that it is, and to endeavor to win inexperienced people to duty by such an axiom, is a downright attempt at swindling, an effort to obtain goods under false pretenses. Virtue is glorious as self-renunciation is glorious, as consecration to God is glorious, as martyrdom is glorious; but it is with a glory often full of earthly pain, even of mortal agony; it is the glory of Gethsemane and of Calvary, the glory of the bloody sweat, the crown of thorns, the scourge, the spear, the cross, the sepulchre; and God—God! is its exceeding great, only satisfying, all-sufficient reward!

But again we leave the humble fortunes of the little girl, who had only her young heart, with all its lovely aspirations and affections, to lay upon the altar of duty. That sensitive heart could not but feel the sacrificial steel and fire. *She* did not find virtue its own reward; and only by often turning to the Lord, did she find warmth and strength for her duty. She was always interested in her work, always busy and always cheerful, yet never happy, never even content; ever there was a great void in the bosom, never to be filled; a mighty hunger of the heart, never to be satisfied; a deep wailing of the spirit, heard through all the business and the clamor of the day. And in the evening, in her own room, with the world shut out, came hunting

dreams of the past, bitter-sweet, and which, reversed, became strange, vague hopes for the future, repelled as soon as recognized, yet oft returning, to be as oft repulsed.

And where was Vivia all this time? Theodora had not heard from her, or any member of her party, since the evening of the death of Basil. That circumstance in itself, however regretted, was not a subject of anxiety, as the last letters of Wakefield Brunton had warned all their friends not to expect letters from them while traveling in Asia and Africa. But now nearly two years had elapsed since they had past into Asia, and in that time, if their departure was not an utter desertion of their friends, they must have found opportunities of writing and transmitting letters. Probably they had done so, though there must have been too many risks in the journey of a letter from the interior of Asia to the interior of America to permit it, except by the merest chance, to come to hand. Thus it was not the failure of letters, but the long-continued absence of Vivia that disturbed Theodora. It was now full time that she should be on her return.

It was in the wane of the second Autumn since Vivia went away that another event occurred, bearing upon the fate of Theodora.

One morning in November, Miss Elizabeth failed to make her appearance at the breakfast table. Theodora missing her, and having no messenger to dispatch, went herself to ascertain the cause of Miss Elizabeth's absence. She found that gentle creature still covered up in her bed.

"Are you not well, Aunt?" inquired Theodora.

"No, my dear, I woke with a chill this morning, and now I have a fever."

"Dear Miss Elizabeth, why did you not rap on the floor, to bring me up to do something for you? I am so sorry. I had not the slightest reason, until I missed you, to think that you were indisposed."

"Dear child, I knew you had enough on your little hands, without having to wait on me," said the meek sufferer.

Theodora laid her hand upon the burning brow and felt the throbbing pulse.

"You have a high fever. Are you suffering in other respects?"

"I have some headache, and pain in the side."

"Some"—it was only necessary to look in her face to see how much pain she patiently endured.

Theodora stooped and pressed her lips to that beating brow, and saying,

"I will be back in another instant;" fluttered down the stairs, and dispatched Jim on horseback to Eyrie for a physician; then made a cup of tea and carried it up to the invalid.

When the doctor arrived—two or three hours later in the day—he found her illness to be a severe attack of pneumonia.

Miss Elizabeth's disease soon ran its course—it was short and fatal. In eight days from the commencement of her illness, it became evident to all that recovery was impossible. The day preceding her death, Theodora, on entering the sick room, found her in tears.

"Come here, my dear," she murmured, faintly; "I wish to talk to you."

Theodora drew a chair to the side of the bed, and bent affectionately to catch her words. But Miss Elizabeth had covered her face with both wasted hands, to conceal the tears that nevertheless found their way between her thin fingers.

"My poor child," she began, sobbing, "I am about to do what will seem a very ungrateful, cruel thing, to you"—and her voice broke down entirely.

Theodora, full of surprise and conjecture, poured out a restorative from a vial into a glass that stood upon the

stand near the bedstead, and slipping her arm under the shoulders of the fainting woman, raised her and placed the cordial to her lips. When the sufferer had drank it, Theodora gently replaced her head on the pillow, put away the glass, and resuming her seat, prepared to listen.

"Yes—a very unkind, ungrateful, cruel thing, to you who have been so devoted to our family—"

"But it is impossible you should do any thing of the sort, Miss Elizabeth. Whatever you do, it cannot even be unkind."

"Ah! my dear, you have not heard! I wish, Theodora, before I die, to manumit Jim and his brother, poor fellows."

"Do it, Miss Elizabeth! do it now."

"Ah! but my child, that act would deprive you of your only dependence, your only farm laborers."

"Oh no, it would not, Miss Elizabeth," said Theodora, eagerly: "they would not leave the farm; I should hire them, and they would work with greater zeal, and also support themselves—their wages would cost me no more than their support does now; so we should not lose, if we did not gain by the exchange. Manumit them, Miss Elizabeth. I cordially approve the act."

"God bless you, child. Send now for a lawyer."

Theodora stooped and kissed the brow of the dying woman, and went to do the errand.

On the afternoon of the same day, the work of manumission was completed. And the next morning at four o'clock, Miss Elizabeth peacefully expired.

When the business of the funeral was over, and the house was restored to order and quiet, Theodora summoned the newly manumitted servants to her presence, informed them of their good fortune, and placed the deeds of manumission, which had been duly recorded and returned, in their hands.

This was so sudden and so unexpected that the boys

received the news of their freedom with as much dismay as joy.

"And what mus' we-dem do now, Miss Teodory," inquired Jim, from the depths of his perplexity.

"Nothing just now. Get used to the idea that you are free, and at the end of a week I will talk with you again."

When the day arrived, she summoned the boys to her presence.

"Jim, I have a proposal to make to you—that you and your brother remain with me. I will pay you the same wages that the hired farm laborers in this neighborhood receive, and you shall occupy the same cabins you have now, and receive the same rations, but will clothe yourselves. What do you say to that? Come, take time to think about it."

Jim's countenance suddenly fell, and his chin dropped upon his breast. It was a bad sign, and Theodora felt uneasy, but refrained from hurrying him. At length the boy spoke.

"We'll stay long o' you, if you want us, Miss Teodory, in course."

But this was said in a tone expressive of so much disappointment, and even sorrow, that Theodora hastened to say,

"Nay, I only make you an offer, preferring you, who have been here all your lives, to strangers; and thinking besides that as you have still to work for a living, you may prefer to work for a mistress you know rather than to seek further."

Still Jim held down his head and twirled his hat.

"But I see," continued the young lady, "that I have not made sufficient allowance for that love of *novelty* natural to all youth, and especially natural to those who have led isolated and monotonous lives." As, in addition to his other unexpressed reasons of embarrassment, Jim understood but

little of this speech, he remained silent, hanging his head. "Therefore," Theodora went on, "you must not think that that I wish to detain you here against your will."

"Miss Teodory, we likes and 'spects de very groun' you walk on. But—"

"—Well, what? Tell me all your mind."

"Me an' Tom was thinking how we 'ould like to go and seek our fortunes—but"

"—And you would not like to be disappointed! I can understand that. Well, go; and if you should not find a better fortune than you have left, come back; you will find the old farm in the same place."

This, then, was the end of that affair. The brothers went to seek their fortunes in the terra incognita of their dreams —the world beyond their mountains. Theodora would not allow them to go forth empty-handed, but gave each a present to save him from want until he should find work.

"It is so natural they should wish to go—they may come back by-and-by. In the mean time, I must supply their places with other laborers."

Again had Theodora's inexperience misled her—mistaken first in the supposition that the boys, in their new-fledged freedom, would be willing to remain upon the old farm, of which they were heartily tired, she was mistaken secondly in the idea that their loss could be easily supplied. There was a great scarcity of hired laborers. The native poor of the place were few in number, and were constantly thinned out by emigration to the Western States, where manual labor did not involve a loss of caste, (I had nearly said of character); and the valley was too far inland and too obscure for the tide of foreign immigration to reach it. Thus the season was far advanced before the young farmeress succeeded in securing the services of two very inefficient sons of Erin, who had strayed into the neighborhood, and whose inexperience and misapprehensions were a constant source

of misfortune. Thus her land was for this season badly prepared, and her seed-grain badly sowed; consequently the crops were very unpromising, and those who passed by remarked—

"Our little farmeress is not this year doing very well."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE END OF ASPIRATION.

Tell me why, good Nature,
Thou madest me what I am, with all the spirit's
Aspiring thoughts and vehement desires
Of happier ones? Ah! rather, why
Didst thou not form me sordid as my fate,
Base-minded, dull, and fit to carry burdens!
Why have I sense to know the curse that's on me?
Is this just dealing, Nature?—*Otway.*

No letter from Vivia yet. "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick"—weareth the heart out. Of late Theodora had ceased to call or send to the post-office. Long since, indeed, she had felt a sort of shame in calling upon the functionary there to look for a letter that never by any chance was found. For many years Vivia had been almost her only correspondent, and now for years Vivia had been silent.

"Truly they will take me for a monomaniac, if I continue to ask for letters that never come," sighed Theodora, as she resolved to put a constraint upon herself, and avoid troubling the post-office.

Nothing in this age and country could be imagined more solitary than the life this young creature led. She had no correspondents, no neighbors, and it might even be said that she had no family circle. It is certain that she had no *companions.*

Old Mrs. Wildman sat smiling serenely in her chair, and dying slowly and calmly from day to day; her intellect had gradually departed—her affections only remained, and these last were centred upon Theodora only, among all living creatures. The memory of things, from the date of Basil's leaving home, the evening of his death, had either faded entirely away or become hopelessly confused. She still often believed Basil to be just gone to the post-office, or momentarily expected back.

"Won't you wait tea for Basil, honey?" would she ask, each evening, as she saw the table set.

"You know Basil took a cup of coffee before he went out," would be Theodora's satisfactory reply.

"Oh, so he did. Seems to me, child, I'm getting old and forgetful. Stay! wa'n't Mrs. Brunton here, too? Where has she gone?"

"Mrs. Brunton started to go home, just before Basil went."

"Oh! so she did, to get home before the storm."

Then, if the evening were clear, the old woman would add—

"But deary me, she needn't have been afraid! I don't see no signs of a storm."

If, on the contrary, the sky were overcast and threatening, she would turn her eyes from window to window, moaning piteously, and perhaps with some faint memory of the tragedy that had occurred. Another distinct recollection she had—it was of the announcement, upon the evening of Basil's last departure for home, of the marriage of Austin Malmaison with Helen Wildman. And this fact—when it came into her head, she announced with equal pride and pleasure to any chance visitor that might come to the house.

"You knew, sir, I suppose," she said, to the tax-collector, "that my granddaughter, Helen, was married?"

"Yes, madam! so I've heard."

"Dear, yes, sir! to Mr. Austin Malmaison;" or sometimes using a stiff, old-fashioned phrase, learned from Miss Elizabeth, she would say—"the young heir of Mount Storm."

She was not conscious of the fact of Miss Elizabeth's death, but always spoke of her as being on a journey or a visit, from which she was soon expected.

But upon Theodora, as has been said, she fixed her whole heart. With the innocent exactions of imbecility, she required the almost incessant attendance of her young protectress, a claim that Theodora could not fail to recognize. Occasionally, the young lady consulted a physician in regard to the proper method of treatment to be observed in Mrs. Wildman's case. The physician repeatedly assured her that the patient might with care survive for many years, while the slightest neglect or disturbance might at any moment cause her death. Further, that the invalid would be most in danger of a fatal attack during the night, for which reason it was advisable that some one should sleep with her, so as to be at hand at a moment's notice to give assistance. There was no one for this service except Theodora, and of course she did not hesitate to perform it. Every one, or almost every one, knows of the deleterious and sometimes deadly effect produced upon a young person by sleeping with an old and infirm one; upon a young creature constitutionally so delicate as was Theodora, this effect was very speedy and very marked. She rapidly lost flesh and strength and color; while, on the contrary, the aged invalid improved in health, seeming to absorb the life her young nurse lost. Perhaps the family physician, when he saw Theodora's fast-failing strength, suspected the cause, for one morning while making a call upon his patient, he asked,

"Who remains with Mrs. Wildman during the night?"

"I do, sir," replied Theodora.

"Then give it up, at once, my dear—it is a slow suicide—in your case, not a *very* 'slow' one either."

But Theodora did *not* give up her post. The fear that her aged charge should some night die without help—was sufficient to conquer any prudent uneasiness upon the score of her own state of health. Once, indeed, she thought of contenting herself with occupying a cot in the same room; but the recollection that she had already three times saved her patient, only through being so near to her as to *feel the jar of her silently fluttering heart*, confirmed her in her resolution of sleeping only by her side. And the more toil and anxiety the aged invalid cost Theodora, the more tenderly the latter loved the helpless object of her care.

But in the mean time the farm was necessarily much neglected, and the two Irish assistants had every thing in their own way. What time their mistress could take from her patient, she bestowed upon the thankless and fruitless task of their instruction and improvement. After spending an hour each morning and each afternoon, in giving them the most careful and exact directions, she would return to the house, and then *they*—but time would fail, and the credulity of my readers be taxed, were it related what misapprehensions and mistakes would ensue the moment the mistress's back was turned.

"Oh, Ireland! Ireland!" Theodora would exclaim, between a sigh and a smile, for it was impossible to say whether their misconstructions and blunders were the more disastrous or the more ludicrous; "Oh, Ireland! Ireland! what have I done to be condemned to civilize two of your sons?"

But the deferential manner, and perfect good humor of the two Hibernians, together with their thorough honesty of purpose, and willingness to be taught, saved them, even after their worst errors, from any reproaches of a mistress so considerate and gentle as was Theodora.

But the farm that year scarcely cleared expenses. And

the young agriculturist begun vainly to look about for better assistance for the ensuing season.

Meanwhile a change was coming over the old lady. Miss Nelly Parrot said that she was falling deeper into dotage every day. She often seemed unconscious of the existence of the persons around her, and spoke to the absent or the dead, as if she were in this immediate presence. Thus she held imaginary conversations with her mother and with her own children. This, at first merely an interesting phenomenon to Theodora, so increased upon its subject, so abstracted her from all visible and temporal things, that it grew alarming.

"My Lord! but this is terrible! She is removed far from us, even while she sits there in our sight! Her body is with us, is living, and her soul is far away! This is very terrible!" exclaimed Theodora.

"Yes! if you've a call to send patients to Bedlam, *there's one* ready for you!" said Miss Nelly.

"Just as sure as you repeat any thing in that style again, I *shall* send one there," replied Theodora, deliberately; while all this time the old lady kept up an imaginary conversation with one of her own children, who had gone to Heaven in its childhood forty years before. Events almost never turn out as our hopes or fears predict. It had been feared that Mrs. Wildman would die in the night. And hence Theodora's sacrifice of her own health. It happened, on the contrary, that the spirit of the aged pilgrim left its earthly tabernacle in the noonday, while she sat in her arm-chair, with her young nurse sitting, sewing by her side. It happened thus. She had been holding an imaginary conversation with her own long-deceased mother—a very pleasant, lively conversation it seemed, for the old lady frequently smiled, and sometimes laughed a sweet, low-toned, jolly laugh, as she would reply. Theodora sewed, and watched her charge with mingled awe and interest.

At length the conversation ceased. Theodora listened, but it was not resumed; she bent forward and looked; but all seemed well; the old lady's hands were laid one over the other upon her lap; her eyes were closed; but a smile lingered around the corners of her mouth, that gave her the expression of one feigning sleep, yet about to betray the jest. Some indefinable impulse—for certainly it was no suspicion of the real state of the case, impelled Theodora to rise and lift up the hand of her patient, and to speak; but there was no reply to her words, and the hand that she had lifted lay lifeless in her own. The spirit had peacefully passed away, leaving its parting smile impressed upon the clay.

It was after the death and funeral of the old lady, that Theodora felt the full sense of her own desolation. There was none left to love her, and no one whom she could love. She seemed indeed "alone in the world." The strength that was no longer needed for the support of others, now failed herself; a feebleness, like idiocy, fell upon her intellect and will—a mortal weakness, nigh unto death, fell upon her frame. She no longer aspired or endeavored; hoped or feared; thought or loved. She scarcely lived.

Early one summer morning Theodora sat musing upon the door step. All was deserted and silent in the house, (for that morning Miss Nelly Parrot, in disgust of solitude, had gone off to inflict a visitation of herself upon Mrs. Brunton and her daughters at Sunset Hills;) and all was still and lonely in the lawn before the door; the high grass bending over and meeting across the narrow foot-path, spoke silently but eloquently of the desolate and abandoned state of the premises. In the distant field, it is true, the two Irish laborers were at work, but their approaches to the house were too infrequent to keep down the grass that grew around the door-step.

"It is in my own heart that death is, after all—the death of starvation. I wonder how many die of the heart's star-

vation," said Theodora to herself, still musing. "I am idle. It is wrong to be idle; therefore I suppose there is a duty in keeping the hands at work, even if the mind cannot be interested in it."

And she arose and went up stairs to get needle-work. She lingered some time, looking over old stores of household stuffs, and while she was still thus engaged she heard a rap at the door at the foot of the stairs. She went down, supposing the rapper to be Dan or John, one of her Irish laborers. And Dan indeed it proved to be, who, with his hands extended, and leaning on each side of the door frame, awaited her.

"Well, Dan, what is it?"

"Please, misthress, it is a lady."

"A lady—what lady?—where?"

"In the parlor where I showed her, ma'am, and I don't know who she is."

"Annie Brunton, I suppose," said Theodora. "Well, Dan, that will do, thank you. I will go to the lady, and you can return to the field."

And Daniel jerked his head by way of a bow, and left by the back door, while Theodora passed into the parlor, wondering what whim had brought Annie Brunton to Red Ridge. As she opened the door she perceived standing, looking out from a distant window, a lady very plainly dressed, yet bearing in her whole appearance, air and attitude, the unmistakable marks of distinction. Something caused Theodora's heart to flutter as she hastened softly toward this lady, who turned at her near approach.

"Vivia! oh! Vivia!" exclaimed Theodora, as she threw herself nearly fainting with joy upon the bosom of her friend.

Vivia sustained her sinking frame, holding her near her heart, and kissing her fondly and frequently, until her

paroxysm of joyous sobs and tears was over, and then she sat down upon a chair, drawing Theodora upon her lap.

"Oh! what a joyful, joyful surprise!" at last again exclaimed the latter between a sob and a smile.

"A surprise! why, dear, were you not expecting me?"

"Oh! expecting you! I had expected to *hear* from you month after month, month after month, until expectation seemed to be nothing but monomania, and then I resigned it, lest the vain hope should craze me," exclaimed Theodora, with a fresh burst of tears.

"But, my love," said Vivia caressing her, "we warned you that after we should have entered Asia, there would be but few and very uncertain means of communicating with our friends here. Returning to Europe we wrote to you, and as soon as possible followed our letters. Arrived at New York, we wrote again."

"No doubt our letters are there waiting for you! dear girl! If I had known that, I should not have given you this surprise."

"Oh! you should! it is such a joyful surprise! And would you have delayed giving me this great happiness for half a day or even half an hour, by sending a messenger before your face? Oh! never! It is so often we have shocks of pain—so seldom shocks of joy, Vivia! And is it you, indeed? Oh! let me look at you again! life has been such a desert waste to me since you went away! Oh! Vivia, let me gaze on you!" cried Theodora, almost hysterically, striving to subdue her sobs, and to clear her eyes from the blinding tears, that she might the better gaze upon her friend.

"Yes, it is you! more beautiful and brilliant than ever. Oh, Heaven! my heart will break with the happiness of seeing you! Yet, oh, Vivia! I wish God would take you to Himself now."

"Why do you say such things?"

"You look so beaming! so radiant! no sorrow has ever come near you—no shadow has ever obscured those eyes and that brow of light—and, oh! Vivia, this world is so dark with sorrow! Can you escape? can you find a path where they will not fall upon you?" said Theodora, in a voice of inexpressible sadness.

"You have been walking in the shadows, *Mignonne*. There are sorrows, but the world is not dark with them."

"In the shadows, oh! yes in the deep shadows of death and the waters of affliction. Do you know what has happened since you went away?"

"Yes, my dear, I know."

"Ah! well, let it pass. Since I see you, all is well with *me;* while for you, I hope that Heaven will keep you from 'the common lot,' and give you a life of unexampled happiness!" said Theodora, in a voice of prayerful love.

"I thank and bless you, dear, for your sweet affection; but would exemption from sorrow in this world be well?" questioned Vivia; and then, without waiting an answer, and wishing to turn the conversation, she said—"But you do not ask me after my traveling companions?"

"True!—I thought," began Theodora, and then a fit of trembling seized her, and her voice broke down.

Vivia came to her aid.

"They are for the present my guests at Red Ridge."

Theodora exerted herself and recovered her voice.

"Austin and Helen are well?"

"Yes."

"And happy?"

"Passably."

"And Wakefield?"

"Wakefield is well," said Vivia; adding, with a smile, "Wakefield has, during our tour of the continent, written a great book of travels, for which I predict—no matter

what—I am a personal friend, and my previsions would not therefore be considered infallible."

"A book of travels! Wakefield!"

"Yes, Dora, surprising as it may seem. The title of the book is 'The Old World seen under New Light,' a title that I shall persuade him to change, as in the event of its being published, that title will give occasion for I know not what sarcasms. Even Austin requested to be informed if the 'New Light' referred to in the text was not that young and brilliant luminary of belles-lettres, his friend, Wakefield Brunton, Esquire—a piece of pleasantry that seriously wounded the sensibilities of the author. I have suggested—'Monuments of the Past in the Light of the Present.'

"Wakefield is going to New York to try to get a publisher. Indeed, he would have remained there for that purpose, but for his impatience to see his mother and sisters."

"Wakefield turned author! Well, I did think, perhaps, that he would make a lawyer, or a doctor, or perhaps a clergyman of himself. But an author—"

"You see, my dear, being a scholar, a thinker, and next a traveler and observer, he could not well help it; but now let us talk of yourself. I have come over to spend the day and night with you; and I wish to take you home with me for a visit to-morrow."

"My own dear Vivia, I thank you; but before I consent, tell me—who will be there to-morrow?"

"No one but Mrs. Brunton and myself. All the young people will be over at the convent."

"Then I will go, dear Vivia."

Vivia was looking at her very affectionately and earnestly, as if pleading for the confidence that she withheld.

Theodora read her thoughts, and answered them as if they had been spoken—

"Well, yes! broken and wasted and sorrowful as I am—

wretched in health, and happiness, and hope, as I am—I do not wish to meet old friends who are happy in all that can make this life happy. I should only be a shadow in their sunshine. So I do not wish to see any one, Vivia, except your dear self."

Vivia was still looking at her with the most solicitous love. Yes! Theodora was wasted, broken, wrecked.

The finest materials *are the first to lose their beauty when put to harsh uses.* The most delicate organizations suffer the most in the rude contact of earthly hardships. Theodora seemed almost a ruin! Illness, disappointment, sorrow, toil, care, want, hopelessness, loneliness, self-neglect, had all combined to do their work of destruction. Fair and fragile she had always been, but now her figure was thin, her complexion sallow, her features sharpened, her cheeks and temples hollow and shadowy, her hair thin, and her eyes sunken. Still Theodora read her thoughts, and replied to them.

"Ay, look at me, Vivia! This is the end of all my high aspirations! Once I dreamed of a glorious life! Very early in childhood—aye, even in the night of my deep obscurity and dark ignorance, an aureole of beauty and of glory, 'like a young sunrise,' lighted up the future of my dreams; beautiful visions visited my mind; beautiful spirits lived in my soul; I knew not how the lovely beings would take outward form; whether in music, or painting, or poetry, or sculpture—for beauty has many forms—but I knew that they lived, and I believed that they must appear! I prevised a sovereignty of genius that should give me a mighty spell over millions of hearts, a power that I would purchase with any amount of renunciation, of labor, and devotion—a power that I would use for the good of man and the glory of God! Yes, I! humble in place, plain in person, weak in health, dreamed of these glorious powers, achievements and elevations! And then came the sweetest

dream of all—but no more of that! My God! even now, after all that has come and passed, the memory of that dream nearly kills me! Oh, Vivia! so to have dreamed, with a common-place earthly life before me!"

"Your dreams were prophecies! it remains for you to fulfill them, Theodora!" said her friend, earnestly.

"Prophecies! Oh, Vivia, do not mock me! Look at me! ruined in health, beauty, fortune and hope—widowed in the bitterest sense of the heart's eternal widowhood—alone, poor, crippled, sick and helpless! This is the end of all—this is death and the grave! This is the end of aspiration!" said Theodora, in a voice that sounded like a dying moan.

"And the beginning of achievement!" exclaimed Vivia, in a tone full of electric life! You have hitherto only aspired!—now shall you begin to achieve!"

"Achieve! me? do not mock my despair!" said Theodora, bitterly.

"Despair! what! despair at twenty-five! Our Blessed Saviour and Exemplar began his earth-work at thirty! His humblest follower may take hope from his example!"

"Alas! Vivia, you do not know how changed I am! the soul seems dead within me! It seems now that I love neither God, nor man, nor nature around me. Once, love for our Father in heaven raised my whole soul as on angel's wings to heaven!—the love of my friends filled my heart with joy! the world of beauty around me thrilled every nerve with rapture! Now, the glory of the morning and the evening, the sublimity of the mountain and the beauty of the valley, wake no response from my soul, and I care no longer either to praise or pray!"

"What! mentally and morally and spiritually dead at twenty-five? Impossible! You are buried alive! I call your soul from its living grave! Awake! arise! put on thy light and strength!" exclaimed Vivia, with her inspiring manner.

"Alas! Vivia! Come closer to me! Lay your hands on me that I may live! for your words, indeed, indeed, fall upon the ears of the dead!"

Vivia took the feeble and desponding one in her own strong and beautiful arms, and lay her head upon her broad and loving breast, and looked down upon her as if she would have transfused from her own rich vital power and glorious spiritual bounty all the life that feeble frame could sustain.

"All that you have hitherto suffered and survived has but prepared you for your work! In all our earliest aspirations, dear Theodora, there is so much of the alloy of self-worship! We desire love that we may be happy, wisdom that we may be powerful—not for the sake of good, not that we may bless our kind and create harmony around us. And it requires suffering to purify genius from selfishness. Now, all that purifies, at first weakens and exhausts, aye, almost unto death! Yet shall there be a resurrection! 'Sown in corruption, raised in incorruption; sown in weakness, raised in strength,' is true also of other things besides the buried human body. Awake! arise, then, oh! Theodora, daughter of God! and put on thy light and thy strength! live thine ideal life! do thine artist's work! think! love! labor!" exclaimed Vivia, with a burning enthusiasm that penetrated and aroused the lethargic brain, and warmed the chilled heart, and inspired the lifeless soul of her protege.

And as those inspiriting words sprang from the glowing lips of Vivia, the strangest and most beautiful phenomena transfigured the face and form of Theodora; the prostrate spirit evoked by faith, arose informing and lifting up the lately collapsed and sinking frame, flushing the pale face and lighting up the heavy eyes, until the whole countenance glowed with beauty, and the whole figure was instinct and erect with strength and grace.

"Ah! that soul only needs arousing that she may cure

the body," thought Vivia, as she, with wistful eyes regarded the child of her favor.

Thus—the former happy in imparting, the latter happy in receiving new life—the lady and her protege passed the day. Vivia bestowing from her own wealthy and bountiful personality, both the spiritual vivacity and physical vitality so much needed to nourish the wasted life-powers of her votary.

Reader, have you ever wondered why the gift of healing by faith should have passed away with the days of our Saviour and His first apostles? Theologians maintain that the gift of miracles was bestowed only to attest the Divine origin of Christianity, and resumed when that religion was established. But there is nothing in the Holy Scriptures to prove that such a limit was attached to the gift of healing. The only condition necessary to the possession of the gift was FAITH—the only limit to the action of this power was—insufficiency of faith. Why now, in these latter days, cannot the Christian believer, called to the bedside of his pain-racked brother, heal him by the Word? Is the Lord less omnipotent, or is man less faithful than in those early ages of Christianity? We all know the tremendous power for good or for evil of man over man, spirit over spirit. Often more converting than the preacher's language is the preacher's tone and gaze and gesture. Often more restoring than all the doctor's drugs is his comforting presence. What then must still be the healing power of Christ put on by man in faith? But this is a subject too deep and sacred for your present writer. Let her return to her narrative.

That night, neither wishing to be separated from the other, Vivia and Theodora occupied the same chamber.

At dawn, Vivia arose and awakened Theodora to prepare for a ride through the beautiful valley by the morning twilight.

They were soon in the saddles. Vivia riding the horse

that had brought her to Red Ridge, and Theodora going on a gentle mare belonging to the farm.

As they wound their way down the narrow bridle-path, leading from the Ridge to the valley, and bordering each side with white dogwood blossoms and pink honeysuckles, all nature seemed just waking up and preparing to sing her matin song of praise.

The valley lay below them, shadowy, green, and fresh with dew—the opposite range of mountains, at the extremity of which were Vivia's Hills, arose darkly against the horizon, now reddened with the coming day.

From all the earth arose a low, glad, thrilling murmur, made up of the first waking movement of woods and fields and streams, of insects, birds and beasts, as though nature softly swept her harp-strings in a prelude to her grand morning song of thanksgiving.

It was altogether a most animating and exhilarating scene.

"It is the most delightful and invigorating ride I ever took," exclaimed Theodora, inhaling a deep, life-giving breath.

"It is because you take this ride at an hour in which you never rode before—between four and five o'clock on a summer morning—an hour of the exceeding beauty of which you never dreamed, I venture to say. Poets and painters have filled volumes with songs, and galleries with pictures, of the sunset, the sunrise, etc.; but poets and painters must be an indolent brotherhood, for they miss the most glorious and inspiring hour of the day or night—the hour of nature's wakening—when we surprise her at her mysteries, when the earth is half spiritual, even if it be not filled with spirits. Whence comes that low, delicious murmur, arising from the ground, as if the earth were one grand harp, whose strings vibrated to the whisper of the breeze? Can it all

come from nature, or are there spirit voices to be heard at this hour?"

"Spirit voices; I love to think that there are spirit voices. Oh! Vivia, I count as lost all the mornings that are gone, in which I have not been out to wait on Mother Nature at her matinal levee. I will not, if I can help it, miss another morning ride."

They reached the foot of the ridge, and passed along a narrow path, through the deep grass, that led to the flower-bordered banks of Mad River. They crossed the stream at a ford where the water was so crystal clear that both riders paused to admire the silvery sand and pearl-like pebbles at the bottom.

Then resuming their reins, they climbed the opposite bank, and proceeded through the deep grass and the low copsewood, and finally the scattering groves of old forest trees that grew up and down, and in and out, among the hills to Vivia's mansion, which they reached at sunrise, in full time for the very early breakfast, for which their ride had given them an appetite.

As Vivia had promised, all the family, with the exception of Mrs. Brunton, were absent at the Convent.

After breakfast, Mrs. Brunton excused herself from further attendance, and departed to occupy herself with domestic affairs, leaving the young ladies together. The middle of the day was spent in repose, and the afternoon was pleasantly passed by the friends in wandering among the beautiful groves, or along the shallow streams among the hills around the mansion-house.

While they sat and rested upon a bank of wild violets, under the shadow of a great elm-tree, and watched the play of the purling brook at their feet, Vivia drew from Theodora a detailed account of all her experience during their long separation.

At the conclusion, Vivia said, "You have acted well and

wisely, dear Theodora, in all that has occurred. But now this immolation of yourself must end. Nay, it *has* ended. Now you must sell or rent your farm; you must accompany me this ensuing autumn to the city; you must open a studio there, and devote yourself to your beloved art. You must give forms to the beauty in your mind; no matter whether those forms of beauty be at once appreciated or accepted; they must be created, and they will be immortal. And if not in your world-life successful, you will be in your spirit-life happy."

"Successful? Happy? Oh! do not even presume to ask it! Successful? Only let my heart burn as heretofore, but not as heretofore, without diffusing light and heat to any! Only let me hear deep oracles of the spirit, as hitherto, but not as hitherto, without the power of utterance to make them acceptable and useful to the soul-needs of any! Let the heart consume itself in its own divine fires, so that it makes some space in the world a little warmer and a little brighter—let the spirit isolate itself, so that it may hear and utter the prophecies within, and then—you may forget the artist in her poverty and obscurity. She will not pine for absent fame or fortune. She will not even know whether she be 'successful.' But—'happy?' Did you say I should be happy? Ah, no! ah, nevermore! nevermore on this earth! Look, Vivia! that poor beetle at our feet; some careless step—it might have been yours or mine—has trodden upon it and crushed one quarter; yet see how it struggles and stumbles as it tries to go along on its remaining sound members! I am like that poor beetle, Vivia! I *feel* very like that poor mutilated insect *looks!* Vivia! the left side of my chest has a crushed and dying feeling, half physical, half spiritual, since the will within seems crippled with the heart."

"You have loved and you have suffered, and with all the strength of your heart! Well! what then? Such are

the conditions of the poet's and the artist's life! such the indispensable conditions of their power! In your childhood you had the aspirations and previsions of genius; you were willing to consecrate yourself to the enthusiasm for art that possessed you; willing to be, or to do, or to suffer —any thing—all things in her service. Well, this love-sorrow came; came, bringing storm and devastation to the calmness of your life; came, laying open, as an earthquake does, the deep abyss of your spirit, and passed, leaving you weak and desolate, yet, in your weakness and your desolation, wiser and more powerful than you could ever have been without that deep experience! Love is the holiest of all teachers, and sorrow is the next! You would not now be willing to annihilate the memory of that love with all the suffering that it has brought, sweet suffering at last, since it has been fruitful of wisdom, power, and beauty! But love is not all a woman's life! do not think it—love is not all of *my* life, and yet you know my life is large and rich! My Theodora, be strong and patient! how short is our earthly life, even of the longest; and how very few live that longest! Long or short, live out *your* life worthily! Live blessing and blessed! Wait for death that dissolves all false marriages, and confirms all true ones! Wait for heaven, where there can be no more illusions of the senses, no more deceptions or *self*-deceptions, no more unions of the false with the true, the evil with the good. Ah! I think, were the truths of heaven only accepted, earth would then possess a divine patience! But, come! the sun has set, the moon is just rising; it is beautiful, but the dew is also falling, and you are not, as I am, on such good terms with nature as to bear her damp as well as her sunshine, so let us return to the house," said Vivia, and rising, she assisted Theodora to her feet.

When they entered the parlor, they found the tea-table set, and Mrs. Brunton waiting to preside at that meal.

"When did our friends say that they would be home?" inquired Vivia.

"They have decided to sleep at the Convent to-night, and to visit to-morrow the Jesuit Seminary, and to return here to-morrow evening. But that reminds me—Mrs. Wildman certainly does not intend to return to Red Ridge to-night?" inquired the old lady, in conclusion.

"No, certainly not; Mrs. Wildman remains my guest until to-morrow afternoon, when I shall myself escort her home, spend the night with her, and come back here on Wednesday morning," answered Vivia, who had just then improvised the plan.

"Ah! you two were always great friends, and you have been so long separated—I do not wonder!" observed the old lady, as she filled out a cup of tea and passed it to Vivia.

Accordingly, Theodora passed that night and the next day at the Hills. And during that time Vivia won her consent to all the plans she had proposed. And even in that short space, Theodora's improvement in spirits, health, and strength, was very marked.

Vivia accompanied her back to Red Ridge, and as they sat alone in the farm-house that night, they discussed the details of Theodora's removal.

"The household furniture may be let, if possible, with the house and farm. The stock must be sold. The two old superannuated negroes must be comfortably provided for in the cabin which they now occupy, and which will also be a home for my two poor young vagrants, Jim and Tom, if they ever should wish to return. But what shall I ever do with my familiar demon, Miss Nelly Parrot?" inquired Theodora, smiling in the midst of her embarrassment.

"Oh! give yourself no concern, my dear, about that. I shall invite her to take up her abode at the hills, where there is room enough to accommodate her without incom-

moding others, and where, in my absence, she will be some amusement to Mrs. Brunton, who can keep her in order."

Soon after, they retired.

And the next morning Vivia took leave of Theodora, and departed to busy herself in procuring a tenant for Red Ridge. She enlisted Wakefield and Austin in the same enterprise. She visited Theodora two or three times each week. And, day by day, Theodora improved in health and spirits; and Vivia smiled joyously to see the blessed change.

On one of her visits to Red Ridge, Vivia was attended by Wakefield Brunton, who since his return had been anxious to pay his respects to his old playmate. The meeting was on both sides a joyous one. Theodora found Wakefield incredibly improved—the sun of the Orient had imparted a rich brown tint to his complexion, and given a higher gloss to his raven black hair, and a deeper fire to his dark eyes; his bearing also was self-poised, dignified, and proud almost to haughtiness; yet his manner, when addressed to herself, was very gentle and respectful, and when addressed to Vivia, was deferential even to humility; there was indeed in his whole deportment to the latter, a sort of sorrowful self-abandonment and deprecation, painful to behold and impossible to understand, and to which Vivia opposed an unvarying kindness, whose passionless serenity was equally inexplicable and almost equally painful.

"What is it? What can it be? Have each or either of these two loved the other? It is impossible to know, for Wakefield's strange manner reveals nothing. And Vivia never taxes another's heart with her own troubles," said Theodora to herself, as she pondered over these things.

Wakefield was almost as much interested in Theodora's fate as she had been in his own and Vivia's; for as he and his companion rode forth from the farm he said,

"Our Theodora has more beauty and interest about her

than she ever had before. Her eyes have the soft brilliancy, and her complexion the 'tender pallor' of Tasso's Leonora."

"She has *soul* beauty, dear Wakefield," answered Vivia.

This was Wakefield's first and his farewell visit; for the next morning he set out on his journey to New York.

Vivia returned to Theodora. The latter thought she detected for the first time a look of deep depression and acute anxiety on the heretofore calm, bright face of her friend, but in a moment, and before she could be sure that it was there, it passed away, and smilingly Vivia said,

"You are growing strong, Theodora! There is no longer a plausible excuse for your keeping your friends at a distance, since I can no longer with truth tell them that you are indisposed. For your own sake and for ours, dear Theodora, be firm; prepare yourself, and come to-morrow to call upon Helen. Break the ice of this estrangement, get only the first interview over, and all will henceforth be well between you! You will find Austin unchanged, and Helen much improved, and both worthy a share of your esteem."

Theodora, who had grown pale and cold at the first proposition, nevertheless replied,

"You are perfectly right, as always, dearest Vivia. We four cannot continue to live thus estranged; the meeting must come sooner or later; it will cost me a pang, but I will go."

"I thank you in the name of us all, my dear. Then I will remain with you to-night, and take you home with me to make the visit to-morrow. Shall it be so?"

"Oh! yes, dearest Vivia! you anticipate my earnest wishes."

"And you will then spend the day with us, or the week, as you shall feel disposed?"

"You shall do with me as you please, dear Vivia."

Accordingly the next morning the friends arose at dawn,

and prepared for another of those delightful rides through the valley in the morning twilight.

When they reached the Hills the sun was just rising, while the household were already up, and Mrs. Brunton's early breakfast prepared in her own room.

"We must take coffee with our housekeeper this morning, Theodora! Indeed I, being an early riser, breakfast with Mrs. Brunton *every* morning, and only sit down to the family breakfast with Austin and Helen as a matter of form," said Vivia, as she assisted her friend to relieve herself of her riding skirt.

"How long will they remain your guests, Vivia?"

"Until we all go up to town together. Their house at Mount Storm will not be ready for their reception this season."

They sat down to the table with good appetites for Mrs. Brunton's fragrant coffee and delicate rice muffins.

And after the morning repast was over they repaired to Vivia's apartment, where Theodora reposed herself until the young couple were ready to receive her in the morning room.

Then Vivia came for her and conducted her in. As soon as she entered, and before she could raise her eyes to see Helen and Austin sitting near one of the balcony windows, Helen sprung up, ran toward her, caught her in her arms, kissed her, and burst into tears. Helen's emotion, strange, perhaps, but perfectly sincere, covered completely any loss of self-possession that Theodora might have betrayed.

When Helen had wept a little over the meeting with the old schoolmate, whose life she had been fated to in many ways imbitter, she took her by the hand to meet Austin, who was standing ready to welcome, and who now advanced to greet her.

She raised her eyes; the same grave and beautiful smile met her glance.

"I am very happy to meet you again, dear Theodora," he said; "I hope you will remain with us awhile. Since returning hither, we have all felt very much the need of your presence to make our family circle complete."

There was as much deference in his manner as there was kindly affection in his words; both together had the effect of calming the disturbance of his listener's bosom, and she replied,

"I am so happy to meet you all again, Austin! They were so long and lonesome—those days of your absence!"

"But now we are returned! Let us never be far or long separated again! I do not see why we five, drawn together by congeniality of temper, may not form one household! I want Vivia and Wakefield to live with us, or to allow us to live with them—but Vivia does not reject, yet does not accept my proposition. Vivia, for the first time, reserves herself. But *you*—now while we all happened to be collected under one roof—how long will you remain with us?"

"I came to spend the day, Austin."

"She will stay at least a week, Austin! And if I have influence enough over her, she will not return to the farm at all."

"Yes! while 'closing business' there, it is just as well that our Dora makes her home with us until we go to town, and then accompanies us thither," said Austin, turning, as he concluded, to Helen, as if to solicit her concurrence in the plan.

Helen nodded, and smiled assent.

Theodora was in the hands of her friends. We all know how docile, and how easily led she was. And her friends disposed of her as they would. She remained at the Hills, only returning to the farm when her presence there was necessary to attend to the sale of the stock, and of the growing crop, and lastly, to the transfer of the possession of the house to the tenant Austin found to take it.

Miss Nelly Parrot, at Vivia's invitation, came over with the last cart-load of valuables from Red Ridge. Miss Nelly was highly delighted at the change from the poor farm-house to the affluent mansion; and consequently, got upon her most dignified and best behavior, until the family were preparing to go to New York, when Miss Nelly invited herself to become one of the party, putting her act upon the most generous grounds, by declaring that she was attached to Theodora, and would never, no, never, forsake her or allow her to go unattended out into a heartless world, etc. In vain Vivia good-humoredly promised to take excellent care of Theodora. No! no! no! Vivia left her once for years, and might leave her again—and *then* what would Theodora do?—Miss Nelly triumphantly inquired, while reiterating her fixed determination to abide by the fortunes of her legitimate protectress. This persistence on the part of the heroic Miss Nelly, must have caused much disturbance to the travelers, had not a providential visitation of rheumatism laid Miss Nelly upon her bed, with a reasonable prospect of remaining there some days. And under the cover of her indisposition, the family party retreated, and commenced their journey.

They reached New York early in December, and took a furnished house, in a quiet street, where they established themselves for the winter.

Wakefield had found a publisher, and *they* found him deeply engaged in reading his proofs.

Austin, in whose name the house had been taken, invited and entreated Wakefield to leave his obscure boarding-house, and come and take up his abode with them for the winter. And at last, after a good deal of hesitation and difficulty, Wakefield yielded with the air of one who accepted an invitation, rather with the intention of pleasing his host than of gratifying himself.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MORE MYSTERIES.

"I thought she loved me—did me grace
To please herself—'twas all her deed;
God makes or fair or foul our face;
If showing mine so caused to bleed
Another's heart, she should have dropped
A word—and straight the play had stopped."

THEODORA, in those days seemed unable to repress her amazement in watching Wakefield, as he came in and went out with his air of perfect ease, independence, authority. His grand seignorial manners were incomprehensible to her, who had known him from his boyhood, through all the days of his penury and obscurity.

"Really, if I had not known Wakefield's origin, I should have taken him for one born in the purple, accustomed to dominion, destined to glory. Yet it seems to me, if I were in his place, an aspirant for fame, the more exalted I became, the more really humble I should be; but men think differently, I suppose."

Instinctively knowing that these criticisms would be unpleasant to Vivia, she never gave them utterance; but one day, feeling this interest in hearing the circumstances that had contributed to "form" Wakefield, she inquired of Vivia, how he had been pleased with their Eastern tour, and how they usually passed their time.

"It is impossible," answered Vivia, "but that he should have been *well* pleased. We traveled under the most favorable conditions of improvement, and for pleasure. Austin and myself, you know, having been abroad before, had

formed a somewhat extensive acquaintance in the higher circles of the principal cities of Europe. We renewed many of those acquaintances, and through them formed many new ones. We presented Wakefield to all our circles simply as a friend and fellow-citizen. And once introduced into society, his personal merits accomplished all the rest."

"Forgive me; all *what* 'rest?'"

A cloud passed over the fine features of Vivia; but immediately by an effort of the will, she smiled brightly, dispelling the shadows, and replied,

"Well, he succeeded brilliantly in the saloons of Paris, and afterward also, in Florence, in Naples, and in Rome. This success—"

Vivia paused, and the same shadow returning to her brow,

"Well, this success—intoxicated him?" suggested Theodora.

"No, certainly not."

"Gave him confidence, then!"

"He did not need that. This success—well! it was very natural! You see what he is—handsome, graceful, gracious—with the condescension of a Prince, rather than the courtesy of a courier; having the air of one who had never met a superior to himself among his own sex—(for his manner to women is ever as deferential as you see it now)—and more than all, possessing a fine and highly cultivated intellect, and conversational powers as brilliant as profound. You perceive then, that being what he is, and introduced as he was, his success was a matter of course. But somehow there prevailed an impression that he was in his own country wealthy and distinguished. In a word, people believed, or took it for granted, that fame and fortune had smiled upon him as favorably as the Muses had. And—would you believe it, Theodora?—our rustic Wakefield really became quarry for manœuvering mothers and mar-

riageable daughters! Of course nothing real in the way of matrimony could have come of such illusions, for supposing it possible that Wakefield could have been ensnared, the moment there should have been a proposal there would also have been a question of marriage settlements, when the suitor's want of wealth must immediately have transpired. I wished the people undeceived; yet even had it been my part to open their eyes, there was no proper opportunity afforded me of doing so. One day I mentioned the subject to Wakefield, who, between a frown and a smile, answered gayly, "Well! what can I do? If the old Countess of Killmanscrew, with her four plain and penniless daughters, takes me for a man of fortune, and follows me from places, lavishing attentions upon—my imaginary *wealth*—what can I say? Must I tell her, "Madame, do not waste your time in hunting me. You mistake in supposing me to be a gentleman of family and fortune. I am only a poor devil—the son of a farm laborer of Maryland—and the secretary of Mr. Austin Malmaison. Consequently, you perceive, I have not money enough to buy your Lady Jane or Lady Mary!" There was some truth in what he laughingly advanced. And as he chose to treat the subject so lightly, it was dropped. We finally got rid of our two flattering friends when we crossed the Mediterranean to enter Africa."

While Vivia spoke, and when she had finished, there was still that struggle between light and shadow on her beautiful face, and when she smiled it was not as formerly, like the clear noonshine of summer, but rather like the sun breaking tearfully through the clouds. She soon arose and left the room.

"Ah! Wakefield is growing very worldly, and that is the source of Vivia's disquietude. Ah! why should that bright spirit ever stoop to love a mortal man? A spirit quickening and sustaining so many others, should lean on God only—should bend to none lower! Oh, Vivia! queen and

muse, why should you love, except only as God loves?" thought Theodora, as she sat alone after this conversation. As she mused with her head bowed upon her hands, a voice fell gently on her ear,

"Pensive or dreaming, dear Theodora?"

She started, and looked up to see Austin standing before her.

"Come," he continued, "let me take you into the parlor; there is something worth your attention, I assure you."

"Thank you, dear Austin," Theodora said, rising and accepting his offered arm.

When they reached the drawing-room, they found Vivia, Wakefield, and Helen grouped around a stand on which lay open a very handsome book.

"See, Theodora, dear, here is Wakefield's first-born—a very pretty bantling, and very elegantly dressed, too!" exclaimed Helen, beckoning her forward.

"Oh!" ejaculated Theodora, with glad surprise; then—"but I thought it was not to be published until the first of next month," she said, joining the group at the stand.

"That is true," said Helen, as she pushed the book toward the last comer; "and it will not be published until the first of the month; but our dear Wakefield was so anxious to see his offspring, that from the very first perfect sheets he had a copy collected, and had it handsomely bound, as you see."

Theodora drew the book toward herself, and examined it with great interest. It was bound in the antique style, richly embossed and gilded, with an illuminated title-page, and an allegorical dedication, in which the work was mystically reoffered to its inspiring source—the Muse—which the initiated only understood to mean Vivia.

Theodora raised her eyes from the dedication page to glance at Wakefield and Vivia.

Wakefield, unconscious, or forgetful of any other presence

near him, stood, earnestly bending forward, and fixing a deprecating, imploring, passionate gaze upon Vivia, who stood mournfully, with averted head, colorless cheek, and drooping eyelids. Theodora immediately withdrew her glance; but while returning to the examination of the volume before her, she pondered—"Ah, what can be the trouble between those two? If she loves him, he certainly adores her! What then keeps them asunder?"

The leaves she turned were full of striking illustrations, from drawings, sketched amid the scenes they represented; but though at another time they must have charmed her attention, now they scarcely appeared to her eyes.

She looked up from the volume to see whether Austin and Helen remarked the by-play that she had surprised.

It was evident that they had not; both were preoccupied. They had withdrawn a step from the stand, and were speaking together in low, vehement tones; but a few words reached Theodora.

"Yes! it was wrong! very wrong," said the one.

"Wrong! Helen!" exclaimed the other in a tone of surprise and displeasure.

"Yes! *wrong*, sir! and therefore I do not *like* it, understand!" said Helen, still in a low tone, but with a passionate earnestness that still further betrayed itself in the swelling bosom, flushed cheeks, and tearful eyes, while Austin regarded her with less of indignation than of sorrowful surprise.

Theodora instantly withdrew her attention, and endeavored to fix it again upon the volume under her hand. It was impossible, for still she mused.

"*They* also! Ah! then is there no happiness in the world—and is every appearance of it *only* appearance?"

Silently and sadly she was turning away, thinking to withdraw unobserved, when Wakefield came to her side.

"You look the image of *il penserosa*, dear Theodora

Does not my poor book please you? I fully expect you to criticise the illustrations, for they are engraved from sketches taken by your humble servant, who cannot give the life and grace to his poor attempts that an artist imparts to his works. Had you been of our party now, dear Theodora, to make sketches while I made notes, we should, between us, have produced a book quite worthy the time the critics will give to cutting this one up. But smile upon the poor stranger at least; for do you know, that no one has smiled upon it yet? It is an unpropitious omen!"

"You are in error, dear Wakefield; it is on the contrary a propitious omen. I have too often seen verified the homely proverb—'a bad beginning makes a good ending'—in other words a 'sowing in tears and reaping in joy,'" said Vivia affectionately, as she came to the young author's side.

"You are doubly mistaken, Mr. Brunton, for I've smiled over your exultant production until my face is fatigued, and just as soon as it is rested, I will begin smiling again. And if you like I will call Mademoiselle Stephanie my French maid, who is an adept at smiling, to smile while I rest. Now I am sure the most zealous friend could not do more," said Helen, advancing with a countenance from which every vestige of dissatisfaction had vanished. At this sally of Helen good humor seemed to be restored.

In a fortnight from that day, Wakefield's book was before the public. I know not whether it were a "phenomenon" of genius, being the first book of a youthful author, probably it was not; possibly it came out at a fortunate point of time; met a want of the public mind; filled some little empty niche in the temple of letters,—(as a graphic feature of the manners and customs of the inhabitants of some unknown part of the globe might now do)—at all events the book was a great success, and Wakefield Brunton became the literary lion of the day; and that, too, when literary lions were not nearly so plentiful and so short-lived

as they are at present; when to be such was really—*rather*—a distinction; perhaps this lionization might also in some degree be justly attributed to other accidents aside from the merit or even from the success of his book; his social connection was most favorable; the Malmaisons had renewed their acquaintance with many of the "upper ten" of New York whom they had met abroad, and consequently saw much company at home and went frequently into society. Wakefield was always of their party; and even his elegant person, graceful address, and brilliant conversation made his presence not only welcome but desirable; it remained only for his literary success to complete his triumph and constitute him the temporary lion of the saloons. Such lionization is of course essentially vulgar and, rightly considered, any thing but a compliment to the modesty and good sense of the lionized. Young aspirants do not think of this—too eager are they to grasp the sparkling tinsel of a transient adulation, mistaking it for the pure and solid gold of an abiding fame. Too often exhilarated with vanity, all earnestness of soul effervesces and evaporates in levity—all taste for patient study departs, and then all power of creation is lost; the divine gift has been slighted and is withdrawn. Where one son of genius withers in neglect, ten perish from adulation, as any one may prove for himself by looking back upon literary history, with this essential difference, however, that the "one" who withers in neglect, still leaves behind some monument of his genius, by which "being dead," he "still speaks" to many succeeding generations—as for instance Chatterton, Keats, Savage, our own Brockden Brown, and many others. While the "ten" who perish through adulation leave little or nothing beyond some imperfect work that expires in its first edition, and a transient memory that dies out with their own personal friends, as, for instance—but we will not recall to memory the names of the fallen stars of our literary firmament.

Wakefield was now exposed to all the alluring dangers of social adulation; whether he were really very much elated by this, does not appear, since he had pride and dignity sufficient to control and reserve himself. Vivia witnessed all his triumphs; she was with him at every party of which he was the centre of observation. And every journal containing a favorable review of his book, speedily found its way to her boudoir. Two months after its publication in New York, it was republished in London, where it was received with even greater favor—an event that was considered a very high honor in those days when Sydney Smith's contemptuous question—"Who reads an American book?" had not received its overwhelming answer.

A friend of Wakefield, an English gentleman, whose acquaintance he had formed at Rome, immediately upon the issue of the London edition of the book, forwarded a copy to the author, so that the latter received it simultaneously with the news of its republication in England. As soon as he had torn off the wrapper, and found what it contained, he carried it where he carried all his triumphs, to the feet of Vivia.

He found her in the drawing-room, in company with her three friends. Austin and Helen were dressed for a ride. Theodora sat sketching at a distant stand. Vivia reclined musing in an arm-chair.

As Wakefield was still a member of the family, he merely nodded to the others, and then passed immediately to Vivia, upon whose lap he placed the book. She opened it, read the title-page, and then raising her serene eyes to the young author's animated countenance, she said quietly—

"Well! it is but a just tribute to you, dear Wakefield."

"Ah! what are you showing Vivia, there?" inquired Helen, gathering up her riding-skirt, and coming toward them.

Vivia handed her the book.

"Oh! a cheap edition of Wakefield's work! Got out for the million, I suppose, as the handsome one was for the upper ten! A pretty idea, but an ugly book."

"It is a London republication of the work," said Wakefield.

"A London—what? Come here, Austin! witness a new triumph of our author! Mr. Brunton, I am proud to know you!" exclaimed Helen, gayly, tendering her hand in congratulation.

Austin joined the group and looked at the book.

"Just what I expected," he said.

"How! just as you expected? Really, you all seemed to have formed expectations for me, which I should never have presumed to form for myself! and yet I am not considered deficient in self-esteem, either!"

"No! parbleu! as our Parisian friends say, you are not; but how came this book to you?"

"By the mail steamer across the ocean."

"Really now—but through whose agency, I mean?"

"Through that of Messieurs, the postmasters, I presume."

"Now that is astonishing! By the way, Wakefield, is not success a means of grace to you? Does it not sweeten your temper, and dispose you to love and truth, and all the heavenly virtues, and all the social amenities?"

Wakefield laughed, and for the moment smoothed his troubled brow.

"Well, Mr. B——— sent me the book."

"Ah! I knew it!"

"Indeed—since when!"

"Since you condescended to inform me, of course; but this I know, 'all out of my own head,' as the children say—namely, that the English publishers never would have had the sagacity to discover this treasure amid what they call the rubbish of American literature, had not their attention

been called to the book by Mr. B———, to whom you sent an early copy."

"Ay! is that the reason why you 'expected it?'"

"Of course!"

"Humph! well, I suppose that is the explanation of it!" said Austin, with a somewhat sobered countenance.

"Why, of course it is, my dear fellow! Ah! if every thing were known, we have little to laud ourselves withal! Come, Nelly, come! the horses are pawing and neighing with impatience while they stand before the door, attracting crowds of little ragged boys, who will 'hooray' when they see us mount."

"*Au revoir*, Wakefield," said Austin, giving his arm to Helen, and taking her out.

When they had left the room, Wakefield still followed them with his eyes or ears, until they had mounted the horses and ridden off. Then he glanced at Vivia, and turned to look at Theodora. The young artist might have been a statue for her unimpressibility by any external scene; evidently, Theodora was abstracted from all knowledge of time, place, and surrounding circumstances. From Theodora's statuesque figure, Wakefield's gaze turned once more upon Vivia. Something sinister, something fateful in his gaze troubled the calmness of her bosom. He was as much at home as herself in Austin's house, therefore there would be no rudeness or unkindness in leaving the room, which she resolved to do. She arose with her usual quietness, and said, calmly,

"I have letters to write for this evening's mail, dear Wakefield—and so you will excuse me for some hours."

And she passed on to retire. But Wakefield seized her hand.

"No! by all my sufferings, no, Vivia! you must not leave me now! the hour has come at last! You must and shall hear me!" he exclaimed in a low, deep thrilling voice,

as with a constraining impulse he restored her to her seat, and folding his arms stood before her.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

RENUNCIATION.

Far, lingering on some distant dawn,
My triumph comes, more sweet than late,
When from these mortal mists withdrawn,
Thy heart shall know me—I can wait.—*Anonymous.*

WAKEFIELD was fearfully pale; his dark eyes, contracted and sunken, gleamed with the fires of a passion aggravated almost to madness.

Vivia remained seated with a serene and queenly aspect, somewhat softened by a slight shade of sorrow.

"Vivia," he began in the cold, formal, measured tone, not of insensibility, but of powerful, and *powerfully repressed* emotion. "Vivia, twice already rejected by you—once in the East, and again on reaching our native shores—there would be more than humiliation, there would be dishonor in urging again that subject; therefore I seek your presence now with no intention of casting myself beneath your feet to solicit your reluctant love! I come to entreat, nay, to demand an explanation of the causes of that fatal inconsistency in your conduct toward myself which has resulted in the wreck of my whole life's happiness! Vivia—were you—all peerless as you are in every other respect—were you still the creature of conventionality, pride, and prejudice, as are too many of your companions in society, I should but consider myself the transient dupe of an accomplished coquette, and should disdain to occupy my thoughts further with the investigation of her motives. But

you are not one of these—as far as the heavens are above the earth, are your thoughts above such low vanities. You never act from indifference, still less from levity or wantonness. Your motives are always serious and conscientious. Some holy principle governed your conduct, therefore, in this as in all things. What was it, Vivia? Why have you led me on by a false hope, step by step, from height to height, to leave me mad, blind, reeling upon the brink of this dizzy precipice of passion and despair?"

"Wakefield, subdue yourself—be calm."

"Calm? I am *still*."

"Yes, still as the storm-fiend when 'he pauses to gather his fearful breath.'"

"Vivia, from the day of our first momentous meeting, through all the years of boyhood, youth, manhood, up to this hour, my soul has been as bare before you as before her Creator; while yours has been as inscrutable to me as—with reverence be it spoken—as that of the Creator. But, Vivia, by the long-protracted trial of years, I swear to you that to-day your heart shall be revealed to me even as mine has been and is to you! I await your explanation."

"Mistaken one! do not insist upon this!"

"I insist—*persist!*"

"Were I to reveal myself to you, you would cease to love me."

"Cease to love you! then it would be because I should cease to live! because the fate of Semele, oh, Muse! would be my fate also!" exclaimed the young man with a sudden burst of enthusiasm.

Vivia remained serene and impassive.

"Your sojourn in the land of ancient poetry and mythology has tinged you with its picturesque tone, Wakefield," was the only comment she made upon his wild words; while heedless of the interruption, he continued—

"And yet I dare it! I dare the fate of Semele! Reveal yourself to me, Vivia, that at last I may see you!"

"Wakefield, your language is that of insanity! Yet I understand you. I would not affect to do otherwise. But speak to me in simple words, if you would have me reply."

"Well then, your motive! your motive! in all your dealings with me?"

"From first to last, your good—purely that."

"My good! Great Heavens! and what was—and is my good! my greatest good! yes! the only and all containing good I ask from Heaven or from you—*yourself!* Oh! Vivia, I deemed you proud and aspiring! I deemed that you would never bestow your peerless self upon one who had not acquired some distinction in this world—"

"That demonstrates that you never indeed knew me aright. The distinctions of this world are too often false and transient."

Without heeding her interruption he went on—

"For *you* I aspired! endeavored! triumphed! *only* for you! from first to last, for you! What was the poor schoolboy's motive? Were there any premiums, medals, set before him? no, but your bright, rewarding smile! What was the youth's incentive? college honors, degrees? In what college truly did he pursue his studies? no! no! but your elevating approbation! And what has been the man's inspiration? fame? wealth? glory? no! no! no! and forever no! but your crowning love!"

Vivia shook her head and waved her hand with a queenly repelling manner; but Wakefield went on—

"What to me—to *me* indeed, is the adulation that has been lavished upon me by these world-worshipers?"—he paused an instant, as a lofty disdain lifted the short upper lip and dilated the thin and quivering nostril of his fine classic profile, and then passed as an emotion, not familiar

to that face; and he continued in a grave and earnest manner—

"Do I not know them? do I not know that men—oh! how much wiser! how much better! how much in every respect worthier than ever I can hope to be!—have perished through the neglect of such as these?—have perished because, though seeming more than men, they were yet not gods, and needed human sympathy and help, and found it not among these worldlings? Do you suppose that I flatter myself, or suffer myself to be elated by all their favor? Do you suppose that I am the least grateful for it, even? Do I not know that any real worth within me never would have won their applause, far less their respect, still less their true sympathy? Do I not know that it is not to myself nor to my work, but to you, *to you* that I owe this social triumph, as I also owe my genius—nay, I had nearly said my soul! And now, Vivia, listen! For all these goods that I have received from you, you have taken a fearful price—a jewel worth them all—my heart's peace!"

A deprecating wave of the hand and the words—

"No! peace is not worth more than all, any more than sleep is worth more than action, death more than life," was the reply that Vivia made.

But he continued with earnestness—

"Oh, Vivia! three days stand out in living light from all the other days of my life! The first—that early spring morning when, while at my boyish work of mending fences, your voice reached my ear, and I turned to behold you!—your little scarlet mantle, your radiant countenance, all glancing in the early sunlight! I see them still—shall ever see them! Oh, Vivia! in that hour my soul seemed first created! The second day was, when, depressed and desponding, I threw down my task and gave myself up to apathy, you suddenly appeared before me, smiled upon me, and, in playful

allusion to the chivalric stories we had read, you decked me with your colors, called me your knight, and bade me rise and struggle with my fate, 'conquering and to conquer!' I tell you, Vivia, that from that hour, a power of endurance and of achievement, undreamed of until then, invested my soul! The third day—we were no longer boy and girl, but youth and maiden—you severed from that glorious aureole—your hair, a ray of light—a ringlet of gold, and laid it on my heart. Vivia! from that moment the strength and patience of a hero descended into my bosom; I felt the power given me to endure, to achieve, to become—any thing! every thing! for your sake. Well, I am young, yet I have won fame, and won the way to wealth! I have laid my honors at your feet, but you scorn alike the offering and the votary! You—the bride for whom I have toiled longer and harder than did Jacob for Rachel—than did Menelaus for Helen, or ever man or demigod for woman, or for goddess—you, the crowning glory of my aspiration—you are not won! You—my muse, my inspirer, my guardian angel and guiding star! you have led me up and up to the summit of this mount of ascension, only to disappear from my sight, to leave me alone on its cold height—alone in bitter desolation! Oh, Muse! why did you appear to the peasant child at his work? Why did you inspire a soul into the soulless clod? that it might suffer, writhe, madden, with a fruitless aspiration, and a worse than fruitless—a destructive passion? Oh, Light! why did you shine upon the poor moth, only that he might consume himself in your cruel fire?"

"Wakefield! nothing but transient madness, the double frenzy of the poet and the lover, could excuse the exaggeration of your language; and nothing whatever can even palliate its irreverence! It is better that I give you no explanation of my motives of action; better that you should leave me, cease to think of me, and, if possible, quite for-

get me," said Vivia, with a grave composure, that seemed to rebuke the passionate vehemence of his language and manner.

It did not even modify his excitement; he exclaimed—

"Leave you? forget you?—*you?*—great Heaven! even you, with all your power, cannot enable me to do that! Oh! you have created a soul—"

"Wakefield, you blaspheme!"

"*Evoked*—and inspired a soul, then! and now you cannot enfranchise that soul from belonging to you, from loving you and worshiping you! No! you cannot, in all the ages of eternity, sever it from your own!"

"And yet must that soul be severed from mine at once—*enfranchisied*—you have used the right word." As Vivia spoke, a cloud overshadowed her radiant brow, and the deep melody of unshed tears trilled in her voice. "Wakefield, you have invoked from me a revelation that I would fain have withheld, and I must make it! It may wound unto death that self-love, that you, in common with all men, possess—it may obscure through all our earthly lives your love for me—yet must I make it! The explanation *unspoken*—and though we separate, your love for me would continue uninterrupted—and though we might suffer in our parting, we might hope to meet again in this world to part no more! but that explanation *once spoken*—your affection for me will grow cold, will die out, and nothing short of a miracle can, in this world, revive it!"

"*My* love for you grow cold, Vivia! Look you! I know that that sun now setting all the western horizon on fire with its glorious light, will, in millions of ages, burn itself out; but—my love for you, ever in time or eternity, grow cold? no! no! not if the soul be immortal!—for my love is limited only by my soul's life! Oh! why should you think otherwise?"

"Because few mortal men's love could survive the revela-

tion I am about to make you! a *woman's* would. Were our cases reversed, my affection would gain new life from a knowledge of the position!"

"And if yours would, then mine will! or if it does not, it will be because it is as full of life now as human love can be! But what, then, is this revelation? I am lost in conjecture!"

"Ah! you will understand when I tell you; you will also wonder that you did not for yourself discover this—*our inverted relation*," said Vivia, who still hesitated, as one who sought excuses to defer the promised explanation. "Well, well! listen then! you have just said, and you have *often* said, that *I*—I—a mortal maiden, had 'created' the soul in your bosom; mere raving, of course, impious raving, Wakefield! that nothing could justify; that you could not endure another should say of us; that of course you yourself in speaking, did not for a second believe; and yet, Wakefield—and yet, in using those wild and sinful words, you *approached something near the truth!*—and this is what you can never bear to hear from me; the learning of which will kill your self-love and your affection for me; yet shall you hear it, for the knowledge will at last enfranchise your spirit, which must at any cost be freed. Yes! you come near the truth! hear *how* near! for though I could not create a soul, I developed yours, which, but for me, would have been stunted and dwarfed! Doubtless I was enabled to do this only through some spiritual, eternal relation between us. I held the one point of that electric chord whose other point animated your bosom. Well, I awakened and aroused the slumbering soul within you—nay, more, I have involuntarily attracted and absorbed that soul, until it is principally by and through me that it lives! You think my thoughts; love my loves; *live my life!* Your sentiments, opinions, principles, are not yours because they are *right*, but because they are *mine!* You

seek to live not in and from the Lord; but in and from me! To live from the Creator is freedom, individuality, life indeed, and life eternal! To live only from a fellow creature, is the abnegation of all these—is death or perversion. In living from me, you forego your own higher place in the order of the Lord's creation. Withdraw yourself therefore from me, Wakefield, and turn to the Lord."

"Vivia, this is all mere trancendentalism!"

"Ah! you really think so?"

"I think that our united life would be very happy!"

"And I have not said that it would not; but happiness is not, any more than peace is, the first object in life! I might indeed give you my hand, as I long since gave you my heart—and my life might be larger, and richer, and happier for the possession of your love; you also might be happier in your false paradise, but you would continue to lose individuality, free agency, spirit-life—all of which I should receive."

"Well! since I am willing! since I am desirous! since I am anxious, to give heart, soul, spirit—all you! why do you hesitate?"

"Because the gift would impoverish you! since you do not look to the Lord, nor open your soul to receive from Him the spiritual life that would make you rich for giving. Because in such inverted relations, our union would be out of the Divine order. The woman should not stand between the Lord and her husband, as in our marriage, I should do."

"Transcendental!"

"No! not even strange, or unusual."

"Marriages, such as this, are more common than you suppose—wherein men become, intellectually, morally, and spiritually, the slaves of higher-souled women; which married pairs, harmoniously related, observe with pity. Often the domination of the woman is invisible—'she by obeying'

—(or rather by *seeming* to obey) 'rules'—but it is not the less a real rule! Sometimes it is for good, sometimes for evil—but in all cases the man loses his spiritual life; because he lives in and from his wife, and not in and from God. In our case, Wakefield, should we now marry, my dominion might be invisible, or it might seem to be for good; you would appear to the world the man of genius, of moral and intellectual greatness, the scholar, the poet, the philosopher! while I should remain overshadowed. But you would not the less have lost your selfhood in me, the real life of your life. Wakefield! my Wakefield! leave the woman whose love would only engulf you! leave her, and grow up into the individual spirit of wisdom and power, that the Lord intended you to be, so that in some future age we may meet and blend forever without destruction—the one to the other!"

"Stop," said Wakefield, shuddering as with a sudden chill; "we all like to be killed or cured, *secundum artem* —we like to know there is a right reason in our sentence. Resolve me therefore this difficulty—if our marriage would be a spiritual loss to me, why then was Basil's marriage such a spiritual gain to him?"

"Because his affection for Theodora lifted him from the sloth and sensuality of his nature—while Theodora's love for him was only a heavenly charity; because their spirits could never meet and blend as ours could, or the one engulf the other as would happen in our case."

"That is all I had to ask you! It is over, then?" questioned the young man with an agonized tone and look.

"It is over for time. For this mortal sphere, Wakefield. I renounce your love! Only in the Heavens, perhaps, will you understand the full meaning and value of this renunciation."

"Vivia, farewell."

"God bless you, Wakefield."

He was gone—and she remained pale, cold, faint, as one from whom all life had been withdrawn. An hour passed, but her attitude continued unchanged. Austin and Helen returned from their ride, looked in, and spoke gayly to her, and disappeared to doff their habits; but she had not noticed or replied to them. A servant came in, and with more noise than necessary, replenished the coal fire, lighted the lamps, closed the shutters, and then approached and asked orders; she did not see or hear; and fearing to disturb her repose, the servant quietly retired.

All this time Theodora had been sitting at the furthest extremity of the two parlors, pursuing her work at a portable drawing-board, first by the light of the setting sun, and now by that of a chandelier that hung above her head.

Vivia still sat wrapped in her cold apathy, until at length "a still, small voice," a plaintive, pleading voice from the other end of the apartment spoke,

"Vivia! oh! Vivia! please come and help me."

What could have rendered Vivia insensible to a call for help? That little cry for aid penetrated where ruder sounds could not have reached, and awoke her from her lethargy. Rousing herself with an effort, she put back the damp hair from her pallid brow and stood up.

"What is it, dear Theodora?"

"Oh, such a strange instance of suspended power! This morning such a glorious subject came into my head. It was Regulus, before the Roman Senate. This afternoon I began to paint it. As I worked, the vision brightened—the countenance of the godlike Roman was before me distinct, and all glorious in the light of his sublime renunciation. But within an hour the vision has receded. I cannot recall it. The face of Regulus I cannot finish, because I can no longer see it. Come, help me, Vivia."

Vivia went to the back parlor, where Theodora sat before her small easel under the light of the hanging lamp.

Before her lay the unfinished picture. Vivia, bending over her shoulder, examined her work.

"Regulus! yes, it is a fine subject, Theodora. Sit patiently before your canvas, therefore, and wait for the vision to reappear; it is a glorious subject," she continued, and drawing forward a chair and seating herself near the little, pale artist, she began to speak of the grand old Roman hero and martyr, of his sublime act of self-immolation on the altar of his country's glory, with an eloquence that belonged to her alone, and with an enthusiasm that communicated itself to Theodora, who soon resumed her pencil, and with a glowing cheek and kindling eye worked on while Vivia talked.

At last when Vivia ceased, Theodora exclaimed in triumph,

"Look now, dear Vivia! is not this Regulus?" and she turned the canvas toward her friend.

"It is a fine picture! That head is Christlike!" said the latter.

"And was not the self-immolation of Regulus Christlike?"

"Somewhat. And it was all the more admirable, that he was a pagan without the revelations of Christianity to sustain him! without the knowledge of another life that should indemnify him."

"I think so, too; there is not much merit in bearing the cross with the certainty of soon wearing the crown."

"No—and we who live in the light of revelation should find the duty of renunciation easier!"

The entrance of Helen and Austin here ended the conversation.

CHAPTER XXXV.

JEALOUSY.

Life may change, but it may fly not:
Hope may vanish, but can die not;
Truth be vailed, but yet it burneth;
Love repulsed, but it returneth.—*Shelley.*

WAKEFIELD returned no more that evening. As he often spent his evenings out, his absence excited no remark. But the next morning he made some excuse of alleged necessity to withdraw from the house to lodgings further down town.

It was within an hour after Wakefield's departure, that Vivia entered the little room over the front entry that had been fitted up as a temporary study, and where the young proprietor now sat reading. She approached the table, and resting her hand upon its top, inquired,

"Dear Austin, are you not in correspondence with Professor Rothsay, the President of the Newton Lyceum?"

"Yes, my dear Vivia," he replied, rising and handing his fair visitor to a chair.

"And is he not making arrangements for a course of lectures by various lecturers?" inquired Vivia, sinking into the offered seat.

"I believe so," replied the young man, resting his hand upon the back of her chair, and bending downward to listen with that reverential attention he always gave to Vivia.

"Well, dear Austin, I wish you to write to Professor Rothsay, and propose Wakefield. He has all the gifts of

a successful public speaker. He would make a brilliant and popular lecturer."

"Ah! Wakefield thinks of taking up this sort of thing, then?"

"No, I do not know; but he will not seek such an engagement, I feel sure; consequently he will not get one, unless it is offered him. And yet it is the best adjunct to his author life. Therefore please do as I request. Name Wakefield to Professor Rothsay; let the proposal come from that quarter; Wakefield will accept; and this arrangement will open to him the way for other engagements of the same sort."

"Very well, my dear Vivia, your will shall be done this hour; but—as what class of lecturer would you have me recommend Wakefield, for instance?"

"I scarcely know any branch of knowledge that Wakefield could not illustrate. Upon many subjects he could speak well; upon some profoundly as brilliantly—the present and future of the East for instance; the same subject that he has treated, but not exhausted, in his book."

"Very well, my dear Vivia; I shall write of him as he deserves, and as you desire."

"I thank you from my heart, Austin."

"Ah! you are too emphatic."

"True, indeed! it is as if you never were kind before, whereas this is but an atom in the world of your kindness to me," said Vivia, as she rose to leave the room. Her voice was faint—that Austin had perceived already; but as she left her chair and turned, the full light of the single window fell directly upon her face and figure; and Austin saw and started.

"My dearest Vivia! why, Vivia! no! do not turn away. What is the matter with you? Your cheeks are pale; your eyes are languid; your voice is hollow; you are going to be ill!"

"I never was ill in my life, dear Austin! Don't be concerned!"

"Vivia! what is it, then? tell your brother," he urged, looking tenderly in her face.

"I want a change; and I shall have it; don't be concerned for me, dear Austin!"

"But, Vivia—" he persisted, still holding her hand.

"Dear Austin, you know that I can take care of myself."

"In health! yes; but in sickness?"

"Wakefield—oh! yes, you promised to name him to the President."

"Vivia," said Austin, growing more and more concerned, "you are pale, and yet you have fever. Go to your room, and let me send for a physician."

"'Physician, heal thyself,' you had best say to me! I have healed many—have I not, my brother? I have upheld many weak hands, strengthened many 'feeble knees,' healed many sick hearts and sick brains; myself shall I not heal?"

"Vivia! let me attend you to your chamber, and send Dora to you."

"No, no, I am not ill; really I am not, Austin; but, come! to content you, I will promise that if I am not perfectly well this afternoon, you may order me to bed and bring the doctor," said Vivia, withdrawing her hand, and turning to depart.

"Very well! You have overruled my judgment, Vivia; but I shall hold you to your promise."

"And I you to yours."

"Ah! as for that, it is needless. I am about to perform it now."

"Good-morning."

"Take care of yourself, my dear Vivia; good-morning," said Austin, as he handed her through the door and reluctantly relinquished her hand.

Vivia went immediately to her own apartment with the

intention of seeking solitude for self-communion and repose Nevertheless, she was not displeased, on opening the door, to see Theodora ensconced in her only lounging chair.

Theodora sat with her head averted and bowed down, and her chin supported on the palm of her hand, while the wavy brown hair, slipped from the comb, rippled down to the dimpled elbow that rested on the arm of the chair. The black dress that she wore, without having any real connection with the subject of her despondency, helped its effects. Vivia thought that she had never seen a living picture lovelier or more graceful than that formed by Theodora then.

Theodora was desponding, weeping, and seeking strength and comfort; therefore she was abundantly welcome.

"Well! what is the matter now, my dear?" inquired Vivia, approaching and putting her arms around her protege.

Theodora started up and threw herself upon the bosom of her protectress, crying, in a plaintive voice—

"Oh, Vivia! I have been waiting for you more than an hour."

"Well, I am here, dear—tell me what ails you!"

"Oh, Vivia, I am so unhappy."

"I can see that."

"Dear Vivia! please let me leave this house! please find me some little place of my own, where I can live and paint my pictures in peace."

"Yes—I will; do not disturb yourself," said the lady, sitting down and drawing the weeping creature within her embrace.

"Oh, Vivia! you do not know how embarrassing, how distressing it is to me to remain here."

"Yes, yes, I know. I had hoped better things from Helen; I had believed that, with all her faults, she possessed a high, generous heart—incapable of such poor jealousy."

"Of me too—"

"Of you, who she *supplanted;* yes, but that makes it all the more natural and likely—a usurper never feels secure—it is part of their retribution."

"But she *is* secure! she has him for whom she dishonored her soul's integrity—as fast bound as church and state can bind him; she knows that nothing but death can deprive her of him! why then does she grudge the brotherly kindness that is so grateful to one so lonely as I am?"

"And so lovely?"

"'Lovely'—do not mock your poor Dora, Vivia!"

"And I do not. Yes, you are lovely, my little Theodora. You have just the sweetest, holiest, most spiritual little face I ever saw. Do you not know it, dear? No, indeed, you do not. Well, I tell you because the knowledge will not hurt you, little humble-minded one! As for Helen! *yes*, she is as secure as church and state can make her, of Austin's hand, name, and fortune; of his heart, she is secure as far as his reason and conscience can control that heart, and no further; and that is the very ground of Helen's uneasiness."

"Ah, what had she to fear from his interest in a poor little lame girl? What interest could I inspire even in the heart of a former lover, save only compassion?"

"Usurpers tremble with or without a cause; but we will talk no more, and think no more of this, dear Theodora. I perceived your embarrassment, and have provided for it."

"You have thought of a home for me, then?"

"I have thought of a voyage."

"How! of a voyage?"

"Yes, dear Theodora."

"Where shall you go then?"

"*We* shall go to Europe, for I intend that you shall accompany me—we shall go to Germany and to Graefenburg."

"We, *I*, to Graefenburg, Vivia?"

"Yes, my dear. Theodora, have you lost all hope of curing your lameness?"

"Oh, yes, long since! Do you not know the decision of the doctors forbade hope?"

"They were wrong, and so are you. There is a mode of cure, and you shall test it. You shall be restored Theodora."

"Ah! if I could dare hope it!"

"There is a peasant in Germany whose body was so crushed and broken, that the physicians resigned all hope of restoring it—then the peasant undertook his own cure and accomplished it. Since which he has cured thousands of all manner of diseases. This magician is called Preissnitz; his spell is *faith*; his agent *water;* his place Graefenburg. And to Graefenburg and to this magician we will go," said Vivia cheerfully. And then to Theodora's wondering looks she replied by giving a detailed account of the rise and progress of Hydropathy, at that time almost unknown in the United States.

"While in Europe," continued Vivia, "we went through Germany, and visited Graefenburg. It was while witnessing the wonder-working effects of the water-cure that I thought of your case, abandoned by the allopathic physicians. We will go thither, and remain months or years if necessary, for it is but a question of time—until you are restored."

There were too many agreeable, not to say delightful elements in this proposed journey, not to meet the eager assent of Theodora. To travel, to cross the ocean, to see the shores of the old world, to go up the Rhine, to see Germany, to stay at Graefenburg, and be restored to perfect health, then to visit all the old cities of the arts, and gaze upon the master-pieces of the old painters and sculptors that had haunted her imagination through many a night

and day of dreaming. All these seen in the poetic light of youth and genius presented multitudinous subjects for delightful thought.

The arrangements for the voyage were then discussed, and the time of their departure fixed for the first of April.

The next day Vivia entered the study of Austin to inform him of the purposed journey. Austin was seated in his customary leathern chair, at his reading table, engaged in the perusal of a letter that he held in his hands. On seeing his visitor he arose, handed a chair, and smilingly offered her the epistle, saying,

"I have just received this from Professor Rothsay. He is willing, upon my recommendation, to engage Brunton. He has written to Wakefield by the same mail that brought this. So we may soon expect to hear from that young gentleman upon the subject of his offer."

"Ah, I am very glad!" exclaimed Vivia, with a bright smile, as she received the letter.

When she had read and returned it, she observed, "The professor is sententious; writes to the purpose, and no more than is strictly necessary; therefore I infer that in writing to Wakefield, he will not waste words in naming your agency in the matter?"

"*Our* agency! don't shirk your share of the sponsorship, Vivia. No, I think he will not mention it! I certainly *hope* he will not; though of course I could not very well request him not to do so."

Before Vivia could reply, there was a light rap at the door, followed by the entrance of Wakefield, who on seeing the lady, bowed coldly and distantly to her, and turned to Austin.

'Ah, Brunton, how do you do? Where have you hidden yourself for the last few days? and what have you been about? Getting up another 'sensation book', eh?" asked Austin, gayly rising and extending his hand.

"I have been—tired and—tiresome also, I think. I have exhausted the city, and the city has exhausted me. I have a broken heart, or an impaired digestion, I cannot decide which! for the symptoms are very similar in both cases, are they not?"

"Don't know! never heard of but one broken heart—namely, that of the ambitious porter, who attempted to lift the millstone, and killed himself in the effort. Well, what news!"

"I told you, I am weary of New York, and want to change my quarters; and, by the way, I have just received a proposal to deliver a course of lectures on the Orient before the Newton Lyceum," said Wakefield, with a somewhat important air.

"Ah, indeed! Let us see that famous proposal!"

"I came, in fact, to lay it before you."

"For my advice upon it?"

"Oh, no! I have already decided without you. I shall accept the terms offered. I came, indeed, also, to say good-by, for although I am not immediately wanted at Newton, yet, as I have nothing to keep me here, I think I shall go on thither, and look around before commencing my labors."

"And so you forsake us altogether? I am sorry you go before it is necessary, but when do you set out?"

"To-morrow morning," replied Wakefield; who, after a few minutes more spent in desultory conversation, took his leave, by shaking hands with Austin, and bowing distantly to Vivia. Austin looked from one to the other in a thoughtful mood, but made no remark beyond an inarticulate "humph!" When Wakefield left the room, he turned to Vivia, and said,

"He does not suspect our agency in this affair!"

"No; but, Austin, I came to you this morning, not with any idea of the agreeable surprise I received; but, on the contrary, with the intention of surprising you a little."

"I am all attention! I am desirous of being surprised; what is it, then?"

"I am going to Europe again."

"Again! I will nominate you to the command of one of the new ocean steamers! Verily, you wish to do nothing but sail to and fro. I shall not consent."

"Luckily your consent, however desirable, is not indispensable, dear Austin. I shall go."

"And whom do you propose to take for company?"

"Theodora."

"I thought so! And you will really leave us, Vivia? There is another gone! What will Helen and myself do?"

"'Love one another.'"

"Sarcastic."

"No—serious! take the Saviour's words to heart; they are the cure for many ills," said Vivia, gravely and sweetly, as she concluded the interview and left the room.

For the next few days Austin opposed the intended voyage with great earnestness and perseverance. But Vivia could not be moved from her purpose; and as she went on steadily with her preparations for departure, Austin's opposition was withdrawn. The first of April came and found Vivia and her protege ready for their voyage. The day before their embarkation they had the satisfaction of receiving the first newspaper report of Wakefield's successful debut as a lecturer.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

RETRIBUTION.

A nobler flame shall warm thy breast,
A brighter maiden faithful prove,
Thy youth, thine age, shall yet be blessed
In woman's love.—*Montgomery.*

It is not our intention to accompany Vivia and Theodora to Europe, or to detail the incidents of their residence there; but, after giving a rapid and condensed account of those painful circumstances that befel some of the nearest friends they had in New York—to pass immediately to the day of their return.

It was not to be expected that a marriage such as the one between Austin and Helen, the result of intrigue on the one side and transient passion on the other, should prove happy in the end. Such never are so; when the short-lived infatuation that effected the false conjunction dies out, the factitious union either drags on through long, weary years of ill-concealed indifference and forced complaisance, or worse —of mutual dislike and incessant bickerings—or *worst*, suddenly and prematurely, breaks in some storm of guilt and sorrow.

And thus it proved in the case of Austin and Helen. Austin—long since recovered from the hallucination of the heart under which he had married Helen—and fully conscious now of the arts by which she had divided him from his first love, and tempted him to her own fatal embrace—yet strove to make the best of his miserable mistake, and to act conscientiously in the trying circumstances. He sought to excuse Helen's conduct upon the grounds of her affec-

tion for him, and as he felt that he could not give her his heart, he gave her all things else that her heart desired. His fortune, his will, his personal presence and devotions were always at her commands.

Helen hated the country and adored the city. Therefore the country house was closed, the plantation left in sole charge of the overseer, and an elegant mansion in a fashionable street was purchased in New York, where they took up their residence. Helen disliked domestic life and doted on society. Therefore the house was superbly fitted up for the entertainment of company, and always full, except upon those occasions when the hostess sought the world without. Helen despised her democratic fellow-citizens and worshiped the foreign aristocracy and the traveled Americans, who were supposed to bring home a certain polish from perhaps having been rubbed up against the gold-laced coats of courtiers in some King's crowded ante-chamber. Therefore her saloon was the resort of all the *soi-disant* German barons, French counts, as well as travel-finished exquisites and mustachioed nondescripts, their satellites and admirers who followed in their train.

And thus, while Austin, when not in attendance upon his wife, was buried in his library, or out upon his long and solitary country rides, Helen, notwithstanding her married state, became the reigning belle of ——— Avenue. Yet could not all the so-called pleasures, excitements and triumphs of society, satisfy the ardent, craving heart of this poor woman. For some months after her marriage she had been intensely happy. The love, vanity and ambition that had conspired to instigate her to tempt and enslave the fancy of Austin, had been gratified to the utmost, and she had lived for awhile in an intoxicating dream! There was then a gradual awakening; but that awakening brought with it no resignation to the loss of that delicious dream! That "happy madness" had passed away, but it left a memory that reu-

dered every other pleasure in life uninteresting to her. Her high-strung organization required the enthusiasm, the excitement of some "grand passion"—it need not have been *love*—had there been any thing in her life to call out zeal, courage, active self-devotion, in a word—*melo-dramatic heroism*—Helen could have been a heroine, could have risked or cast away her young life in any glorious achievement, could have done any thing except live on and on, in a monotonous and wearying round of so-called pleasures that, after their first novelty was passed, became "flat, stale and unprofitable" to an insufferable degree. Helen had not the womanly heroism of self-control and calm endurance—nor the christian heroism of philanthropy; and as there was nothing in her days upon which to expend the fire of her soul, its suppressed burning consumed her heart.

It was at this imminent period in her experience that a newly-arrived, and reputedly distinguished foreigner, Comte Albert De Ville, was presented to her. I shall pass hastily over the miserable results of that acquaintanceship. De Ville possessed a handsome person, an accomplished mind, and an insinuating address. He had easily entered the uppermost circle of fashionable life, and as easily obtained the *entree* to the saloon of Mrs. Malmaison. He sought to fascinate his beautiful hostess, and succeeded in pleasing her. The "innocent" flirtation was, on Helen's part, entered upon unconsciously, and pursued thoughtlessly, until her interest began to be excited, and then—we know not, but may partly guess what must have been the throes and struggles of that erring heart before it fell into sin. Helen was too beautiful and too impassioned to enact with safety to herself, her attempted rôle of "married flirt." Now while I do not wish to palliate the sinfulness of Helen's conduct, I do intend to remind you that there is much to be remembered in mercy to her. She was from earliest infancy fatherless and motherless, she was sisterless, brotherless; and

if not a neglected, she was assuredly an *unloved and childless wife.* Could she have remembered her mother's face or prayers, that remembrance might have saved her! or, failing that and *all things else*—had she herself been a mother, had she borne but one little child, that child would have been her protection. Yes! though she had only borne it to lay it in its grave, the memory of that child would have been her salvation! Alas! that none of these saving influences were for her! Though at this world's bar, man may not take these things into consideration in condemning her, yet at Heaven's Tribunal it may be that the Lord will, in judging her.

However this might be, to make the sad story short, one miserable evening Helen went out to a party, and returned home no more.

And the next day the whole city was agog with the last story of a great scandal in high life. The reporters of the press ferreted out all the particulars of the case, and in their desire to cater to the morbid cravings of their readers, suppressed no circumstance in that story of sin.

Austin, wrapped as with a garment of fire in the burning shame that had fallen upon him, fled the scene of his dishonor; but he fled as the avenger flies, to pursue and to punish.

He followed the guilty pair to Europe; and for many months, during which he visited the principal cities there, he was lost to the knowledge of his friends. But pursuing a fugitive couple in Europe, must be very like the old housewife's proverb of hunting a needle in a hay-rick.

Austin found no certain clue to their retreat.

At the end of fourteen months, he returned to New York. And the week after his arrival, chancing to be in the reading-room of the Astor House, he picked up the Herald, and in that *omnium gatherem* of the whole world's gossip, he found news of those whom for more than a year he had

vainly sought through Europe. It was comprised in a short paragraph in the letter of the Paris correspondent, and was as follows :—

"The beautiful Mrs. M——n, whose elopement with the Comte De Ville, some time ago, caused such an excitement in the uppertendom of your city, died recently in the Rue St Catherine, here, in great destitution."

That was all!

Austin's first experience on reading this, was one of deep compassion, mingled with inexpressible relief.

As in a panorama, he saw the whole untold history of the last year—her short-lived passion, or rather insanity, her swift recovery of moral sense, her terrible remorse, driving her from the presence of her companion in sin, her insufferable humiliation compelling her to hide her head in deep obscurity, the accumulated wretchedness of mind, body, and surrounding circumstances that, like the merciless action of "some mighty torture-engine's whole force," swiftly destroyed her life!

All this passed rapidly with the distinctness of living pictures, and the assuredness of revelation before his mind's eye; and mingled, as I said, with the deep compassion that caused his heart to bleed was a feeling of unspeakable relief. She was gone—she could sin no longer, suffer no more on this earth—"Never more on her should sorrow light, or shame." And this was well—well!

Austin's next idea was to recross the ocean, to obtain fuller and more reliable information of the circumstances attending her death. It is true that he need not for this purpose have made another voyage; he might have written to some one of his numerous friends in Paris to investigate and ascertain all that he wished to know; but apart from the unconquerable repugnance he felt to naming the subject of his sorrow, or reviving the memory of the miserable woman in the bosom of any friend, was that excessive rest-

lessness of soul, that irresistible necessity for motion, change, distraction, something to disintegrate and dissipate the heavy burning weight of grief and shame that lay within his heart.

Therefore, by the next outward-bound steamer, he sailed once more for the shores of Europe. He landed at Havre, posted to Paris, went to the Rue St. Catherine, to the obscure house where she had lodged, and to the room where she had died—

"Of a *maladie-sans-maladie*," as the concierge informed him. Then he sought out the physician who had attended her, and whose report of her illness—"a low, nervous fever, in which the mind was primarily affected," corroborated all his own secret previsions. Then he visited the *Cemetiere de l'Hopital*, and gazed upon the humble grave that charity had given her.

That was all. Her personal effects had been swallowed up by her necessities. She had left no papers of any description, expressed no feeling, given no information, sent no message. She was not one, indeed, from whom a death-bed confession was to be expected. She had too much pride, and upon occasion, too much secretiveness for that. She was one "to die and make no sign."

Without meeting a single friend or acquaintance, Austin left Paris as swiftly and secretly as he came, embarked upon the first homeward-bound steamer, and returned to New York.

Experiencing still the indispensable necessity for exciting action, Austin Malmaison arrived at home at the commencement of one of those political struggles between opposing parties that occasionally engage and agitate the whole length and breadth of our land. The spirit of Native Americanism was at its height. As some unhappy men betake themselves to drinking, and others to gambling,

Austin Malmaison cast himself into the melee of political warfare.

It not unfrequently happens that some obscure, unconscious, personal motive underlies and governs the opinions and principles of even the most sincerely intending men.

And thus it might have been with Mr. Malmaison. A foreign sprig of nobility had been the occasion of his family wreck; and hence, perhaps, he, that had always been excessively cosmopolitan in all his sentiments, now became extremely "native," and devoted his time, talents, and fortune to the promotion of the interests of that party. Naturally, he soon became one of the most popular and efficient men in their ranks. Consequently, in the conventions, barbecues, mass meetings, and field speakings, he soon found distraction enough.

Meantime, while Austin Malmaison found forgetfulness of his domestic calamities in the excitements of political struggle, Wakefield Brunton, was living through another set of experiences. After his repulse by Vivia, his whole personality of body, mind, and spirit, reeled as a cripple might, from whom some habitual support had been withdrawn, and shivered as one cast out from light and heat into outer darkness and cold. He possessed, however, a sufficiency of self-control, and none of this inward, shuddering weakness was apparent in the manner of the brilliant and popular lecturer.

This was the period of wounded self-love, unjust judgment, and bitter resentment. He hated, or believed that he hated Vivia, and he fell into a sarcastic style of writing and speaking whenever woman chanced to be his theme. About this time the infidelity of Helen, and the wrongs and the grief of Austin, had a powerful effect on his mind, and served to confirm him for the time in his cynical mood. Being engaged in delivering a course of lectures on the origin and history of the Reformation, he chose to deal

very harshly with the memory of the historical women of that period, without regard to party; and the Protestant Elizabeth Tudor and the Catholic Catherine de Medicis, suffered almost equally in their fame at his hands. Every thing took form and color and character from his mood. And is not this too often the case even with the clearest and frankest intellects?

But with one of Wakefield Brunton's moral and intellectual excellence, this jaundiced and distorted state of mind could not remain permanent. An affair merely of wounded love and humbled pride, it yielded in time to reason and conscience; there was a healthy reaction; his troubled soul settled and cleared; he looked around upon the world with a true and steady eye; and knowing now his power and his sphere of labor, he sought to purify his soul from pride, anger, injustice, and every form of selfishness; to give a spotless votary to the service of God and man; to waive his love of present good fame, and to throw the whole weight of his talent and influence, though it were relatively the weight of a grain of sand, into the scale of outraged truth, justice, and humanity; aye! even though this should bring him proscription instead of adulation, hatred for liking, contempt for honor, infamy for glory. Some years ago the age of martyrdom had not passed; any one could have had *that* crown for the seeking. I know not if it be fully passed *now;* but now, at least, the right reason of all dogmas, religious, political, and social, may be freely discussed without costing the questioner his reputation for honesty or for veracity; his place in the hearts of his friends; and his position in society; when as *then*—though the advocates of free thought were not, as in still darker ages, imprisoned, banished, sold into slavery, or broken on the wheel, yet they ever were *proscribed*, and the terms, "fanatic," "infidel," "madman," were indiscriminately applied. "The animal is mad, avoid or destroy him," was

in effect, the sentence of the world upon any man of genius who dared to think or speak in advance of his time.

This was the sentence soon pronounced upon Wakefield. It takes a man but a little while thus to ruin himself with this world. Let an orthodox minister of the gospel, who has been prophesying "smooth things" to a sleepy congregation all his life, but once speak out the truth that perhaps has been secretly burning in his soul for years, and you shall see the holy horror that he shall inspire. And yet must the truth be spoken: for no matter in what manner it is received, it will remain in the memory, it will *gain* space even as in time it will *fill* space.

But Wakefield's worldly popularity waned from the time that, without fear or favor, he began to write and to speak his truth. He wrote books and published them, but the profits of the sales little more than covered the expences of their publication, while the principles they advocated provoked a storm of criticism more than sufficient to crush any youthful author. Thus his works were profitable neither for his pocket or his reputation. But what of that, if, by their dissemination, his truth should find its way into some mind where it might possibly germinate like good seed in good ground, and bring fruit, "some thirty, some fifty, and some an hundred fold?" So as long as he could find readers, Wakefield was content to write and starve. But even this ended. As his books were not more profitable to the publisher than to himself, he began to find it very difficult, and afterward quite impossible, to induce any house to undertake the enterprise of bringing out his works. As he himself was too poor to print them, his usefulness seemed to be gone. Yet he wrote on.

Still for a while his erudition and talents as a lecturer procured him a few engagements. But as in every subject, whether of history, science, or belles-lettres, with which philosophy deals, there are the principles of truths and the

dogmas of falsehoods, it was impossible for Wakefield to give a course of lectures without revealing his "peculiar views." And thus the lyceums misunderstood or feared him; and his popularity as a public speaker declined and died out.

It would be too sad to trace his downward steps to extreme poverty.

"Who has not seen," says Emerson, "the tragedy of imprudent genius, struggling for years with paltry pecuniary difficulties, at last sinking, chilled, exhausted and faithless, like a giant slaughtered by pins?"

But Wakefield's case was not exactly such as this. It is true that he had no trade, because in his boyhood and youth his whole nature had set in as by a powerful attraction to a life of intellectual labor. And he had never studied a profession, not from want of industry, because we know that he had been an indefatigable student, but from a too fastidious dislike to the imperfection and quackery inseparable from each. And now as his chosen vocation of author and lecturer failed to support him as a gentleman, Wakefield, instead of getting into debt, or obtaining money from any friend, had the simple honesty to come down in his pretensions, and to seem the poor man that he really was. He took a cheap lodging, purchased plain food, and wore coarse clothing. And even then, rather than remain in the debt of his poor landlady or washerwoman, he would go out and do a day's manual labor whenever he could find employment.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

COMPENSATION.

No more alone, through this world's wilderness,
Although I trod the paths of high intent,
I journeyed now, no more companionless,
Where solitude is like despair, I went.—*Shelley.*

It was a glorious evening near the first of October, when the steamer that brought home Vivia and Theodora touched the wharf at New York.

Austin had come to the city to meet them, and had taken lodgings so near the landing place, that he was enabled to be upon the spot to receive them at the moment of their arrival.

The assemblage was so great, that for awhile it seemed impossible to get sight of the party for whom he came to look.

Vivia was the first to emerge from the dense crowd; she came, drawing gently after her Theodora, who still hung upon her arm, and followed by an elderly maid and footman, who carried sunshades, shawls, reticules, and such other little personal belongings as had not been packed up.

On seeing them, Austin sprang forward to greet them, shaking hands cordially again and again, and still lingering over that ceremony until the increasing pressure of the crowd making him feel that he "stopped the way," obliged him to get between, and give an arm to each of the ladies, and hurry them from the deck to the wharf, and to the carriage, that stood in waiting at a short distance.

The drive to the hotel occupied but a few moments. All questions were, by tacit consent, deferred until they reached

the private parlor of the party. Then, when the coach was dismissed, and the ladies' bonnets and shawls laid off and consigned to the care of their attendants who had followed in a cab, and the three friends found themselves alone together, Austin drew his chair up before the sofa upon which Theodora and Vivia sat side by side, and for an instant, in silence, they looked at one another with that deep interest of curiosity with which friends long separated, upon their first meeting, examine each other. And in that single instant of silent study, revelations were given and received. As Austin looked from one to the other of his recovered friends, he found them both changed.

Vivia seemed less brilliant than formerly. The far-reaching, vivid lightning of her eyes seemed called back, gathered in; and now those once flashing orbs shone with a still, deep, starlike radiance, and the tones of her voice were less elastic and vivacious, but smoother, calmer, sweeter than formerly. For the rest, she was paler and quieter.

But Theodora! He had been before struck with the change in *her*, which every motion and gesture from the moment of leaving the ship to that of entering the hotel had revealed, exciting still ever-increasing surprise. Could this graceful woman, whose every motion was full of elasticity, and whose countenance was sparkling with vivacity, could this indeed be the once pale, dejected little cripple? Had the long living with Vivia effected this change? and above all, had the electric life received by the former been given from the life of the latter? Austin could scarcely, for wonder, remove his attention from them.

And they, on their part, had, in that single instant taken in all the change that had passed over him. And this was a sad and blighting change. It is true that they who were intimately acquainted with his character, and knew also his last great trial, had expected to find him

altered, worn, and haggard. This would have been too natural to be wondered at. But, ah! the change was not that produced by sorrow or humiliation, but by something more deplorable. The marks upon his altered brow were not only those of grief, but of excess. As Vivia gazed for a moment upon him, the keenest pang that had ever entered that generous bosom, now wrung her heart. The man sitting before her was really Austin, and yet seemed not to be him. It is true, there were the same tall and finely proportioned form, the same regular, classic features, the same graceful and distinguished bearing; where, then, was the change? Something was missing from the expression of his eyes, and from the tone of his voice; alas! the purity of both was gone, or rather the innocency of soul was gone, and in the eye and in the voice the loss was betrayed! There was a certain thickness and huskiness in the deep-toned voice, once pure as the notes of an organ; a certain semi-opacity in the dark, impassioned eyes, once clear as those of childhood; a turbidness, not to say dark flush over the rich complexion, once transparent as that of womanhood; and a fullness, to use no harsher term, about the fine features, once as cleanly cut and clearly defined as those of a classic statue. Very slight were these indices to the perception of superficial spectators. They did not detract much from the external grace, dignity, and beauty of his appearance, nor from his reputation as a very handsome man and accomplished gentleman; they would scarcely have been noticed by an indifferent acquaintance; but to one as deeply interested as was Vivia, they were, alas! tokens slight but sure of a soul world-warped, sense-sodden! His style of conversation also partook of the same change.

Even Theodora's soul recoiled from one who had once been all in all to her.

It took, as I said, but a moment of mutual observation

for each party to perceive in the other these changes, good and bad. Vivia was the first to break the momentary silence.

"Well, we meet again after so long a separation, dear Austin. It was a long anticipated joy to me."

"And to me, then! I tell you, Vivia, that I have counted the hours for months since you have been expected home. And you, dear Theodora, are you not happy to touch your native land again?" he said, turning with something like his old smile to the latter.

"Oh yes; but I am gladder to see my friends again."

"Well! what does that *sigh* mean? that you have left regrets behind?"

"Oh, no; I have left no regrets behind, and brought nothing but happy memories away."

"Well, what then?"

"There is one wanted to complete our party. Where is Wakefield, dear Austin?" she inquired evasively.

Austin's countenance grew grave and troubled, and Vivia roused her attention and bent forward to listen.

But Austin only answered by asking another question.

"You have read his last volume of Essays?"

"Oh, 'The Progress of Truth!' yes, and admired it exceedingly. But do such books succeed? what has been its fate?"

"Hum-m-m—you have already surmised it."

"But the author—our Wakefield?"

"Suffers the penalty of all would-be 'world menders,'" replied Austin, who then commenced and gave a summary history of the declension and death of Wakefield's popularity. He concluded by saying, "Wakefield was very unwise. I begin to think genius lacks common sense. He sacrificed to an absurd conscientiousness a prospect of the most brilliant career that ever opened before a young author. Society is not prepared to receive his views, and he

should have seen it; there is a fitting time and place for speaking the truth, and he should have known it."

"Yes," said Vivia, in a tone of sweetness and solemnity, "there *is* a fitting time and place for speaking the truth. The *time is—when* the opposite falsehood exists; the *place is—where* it prevails! No matter if, out of the million, but one receives that truth—in that heart it will live, germinate, and spread—bear seed, and scatter them to take root in other prepared hearts; its growth may be checked, but its fruitfulness can never be destroyed—it will reproduce itself and spread until it fills the earth. Therefore has the condemned book not been written in vain, nor has the broken-hearted author perished in vain!"

"Perished! Vivia?"

"Aye! perished! I use that term in its finite meaning—for the soul and its truth are coeternal. But where then is Wakefield? Austin, where is thy bosom friend?" said Vivia, bringing those two star-like eyes to bear full upon her cousin's face and soul. "Aye! 'Cain, where is thy brother Abel?'"

"I might ask, 'Am I my brother's keeper?'—if, indeed, that brother were one to submit to bonds, except to those fair bonds that were refused to him?"

"Have you seen him since you came up to town?"

"No, for I did not know where to seek him. It is said that he has hidden himself in some poor lodgings in the heart of the city; but where exactly, I could not learn."

"But you have written to him?"

"Certainly—at a venture; but have as yet received no answer—in fact, there has been no time for an answer. But come, ladies, here is supper; let us then adjourn the discussion to another occasion," said Austin, as a couple of waiters entered, bearing the materials for their evening repast.

As this was near the first of October, and as the Presi-

dential elec ion was drawing very near, Austin seemed extremely anxious to return to the field of struggle.

Vivia, on the other hand, was for several reasons desirous of remaining for the present in town. Among other motives was her wish to serve Theodora, whose successful pursuit of art would require a city residence. Therefore, so soon as Austin had ascertained the intention of his cousin, he hastened to engage for her party a suite of pleasant rooms, in an up-town hotel—and when he had seen them comfortably settled there, he took leave and hurried off to the various scenes of political conflict.

Vivia's old friends began to gather around her, and soon "the muse and beauty" suffered herself to be drawn into the vortex of fashionable life. She had a double motive—to feel the pulse of society in regard to Wakefield, and also to introduce Theodora to some of those few worthy and influential souls who mingle in fashionable society and almost redeem its general frivolity.

In respect to Wakefield, she discovered that he was socially dead and forgotten—and a new literary lion, a young gentleman who had written a volume of *outre* verses, roared in his stead. She could gain no clue to Wakefield's residence; his publisher had entirely lost sight of him; and the Directories pointed out none but householders and business firms. At length Vivia resolved to write to Mrs. Brunton, who was still in charge at Sunset Hills, for the address of her son. It seemed a little absurd to be under the necessity of writing to Maryland to get information of an individual, whom she knew to be in the city from which she wrote; but there was in fact no alternative in seeking intelligence of Wakefield.

While waiting for the slow response of poor old Mrs. Brunton's unpracticed pen, Vivia pursued her quiet search for Wakefield, and at the same time assisted Theodora in

her quest after a suitable house, where the latter could take up her residence, and set up her studio.

One morning Vivia left Theodora entranced before her easel, the subject of her picture being the arraignment of William Wallace. After an absence of three hours, Vivia returned, and found her friend in the reaction of creative fever, sitting dreaming in the rocking-chair.

"I have good news for you, *petitte*. I have found a beautiful little cottage in a garden in the heart of the city, that will just suit you."

"Oh, indeed! have you? I am very glad! it is really providential!"

"Well, we will go and see it this afternoon, Dora, and if you like it, as I know you will, we can furnish it to-morrow. By the way, have any letters been left for me?"

"Yes, three, and several papers. One of the letters is from Austin, and another from old Mrs. Brunton; I know their handwritings; the third I think is merely an invitation to some party."

"Give me Mrs. Brunton's letter," exclaimed Vivia, as she took it and broke the seal.

It was a very respectable, affectionate, but formally-worded and brief communication, expressing the deepest devotion to her to whom it was addressed, and giving the intelligence that Wakefield lived at "No. — Catherine street, third floor, back."

"We will, after visiting your cottage, my dear, drive down that street to see what sort of a place it is. Now, let us see what Austin talks about," said Vivia, breaking the seal of the second letter.

Austin's "talk" was of barbecues, political dinners, etc. When Vivia had finished reading, she sighed deeply, and looked at Theodora, whose face had become pale and sad. They both feared that habits of excessive conviviality were ruining Austin; but in their tenderness of his good name,

neither uttered even to the other the thought uppermost in her mind. Vivia silently opened the third letter, which was found to be only a business circular; and then she examined the papers, that were everywhere filled with political news and discussions. Several times she met the name of her cousin; and as her half dozen papers were about equally divided between the opposing parties, in some sheets that name was connected with high praise, and in others with severe animadversions. His habits of self-indulgence were exaggerated into gross excesses—his private history was exposed, his domestic misfortunes distorted after the fashion of those political writers of all parties, who make us believe that there is no such thing as truth and candor in *any* party paper.

"What an audacious falsehood! Is there, then, neither honesty nor decency among these politicians?"

Vivia smiled sadly.

"It is of no use to grow excited. In these fierce contests it is even as the sage says: 'Almost St. Paul will lie—almost St. John will hate.' Come, let us to dinner, and then to our drive."

That afternoon the cottage was visited, approved, and secured. On their return home, Vivia made a little circuit to visit Catherine street and find No. —

The house in question was one of a long row of old three-story red-brick buildings, chiefly occupied by pawnbrokers, second-hand furniture dealers, and old clothes vendors. It was about midway of the square; the front shop and ground-floor was tenanted by an old Jew merchant of cast-off garments, and the upper rooms were let out separately to lodgers. It was with a strange blending of anguish and exultation that Vivia looked upon the wretched scene of Wakefield's renunciation; it was with emotions akin to those with which the faithful once witnessed the pangs and

triumphs of the martyr. They drove slowly past the house, turned the corner and went home.

The next day the newly-rented cottage was furnished, and Theodora's trunks and boxes were conveyed thither. The studio was fited up, and the pictures she had painted during her residence in Europe were unpacked and set up.

As the annual exhibition was near at hand, two of the best pictures were sent up to the Academy as candidates for admission, and one of them, "The Fall of Lucifer," was accepted. It was a terrible and magnificent picture, though severe in the unity and simplicity of its composition. The scenery was the immensity of space in darkness, the sole figure was that of the falling angel, with locks streaming upward, from the swiftness of descent. It was a work of which, some months after its completion, the young artist herself said, that she could scarcely recognize it as her own work, or realize again the state of soul in which it had been painted. But when it came to ticketing the accepted picture with a price, Theodora objected,—

"I cannot do it, Vivia! I would not part with Regulus or William Wallace at all, except to give either of them away to any dear friend that loved them. As for Lucifer, I have no objections to disposing of that. But whoever wants it, supposing any one does, must give me what they please. I am not a tradeswoman, and cannot meddle with such matters without a declension of power. I know not how this may be with stronger minds."

When the day of the opening of the Academy arrived, Vivia and Theodora attended in the crowd. There were several hundred pictures on exhibition, and among them were two or three very fine paintings, since of world-wide fame.

After these, Theodora's picture attracted the most attention. It was purchased by a gentleman of Boston, who, hearing of the young artist's circumstances, offered what

every one considered a munificent price for its possession. This sum made Theodora independent for the time. While holding the sum in her hand, before going to place it in a bank, she said,

"Vivia, I feel somehow ashamed to keep all this money for myself, while my old playmate and friend, who has worked harder and better than myself, remains in penury. I want to send, anonymously, a portion of this to Wakefield."

"Do not dare to do so! I would sooner offer alms to a prince of the blood."

"But what shall I do?" complained Theodora; and to endorse her words, the "eloquent blood" suffused her cheek in an ingenuous blush—"I feel it to be disgraceful to enjoy prosperity while our brother suffers adversity."

Vivia's countenance suddenly flashed with a radiant smile, and she said slowly, and with an ineffable sweetness, as if each spoken thought were dwelt upon delightedly,

"A choice spirit does not heed privations. The image of the Most High, he dwelleth in temples not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. The kingdom of this world, and the glory thereof, has not failed to be offered to him, if only he would fall down and worship the Satan of falsehoods. He would not. Therefore his empire is not of time or of space—it is in eternity and infinitude!"

Theodora's countenance, on the contrary, still revealed the anxiety and dejection of her soul. She gazed suspiciously and remorsefully upon the gold in her lap.

"Oh, Vivia!" she said, "when I think of Wakefield's misfortunes, I look upon my own success as a proof that I have no real merit at all; when I think of his rejection by this world, I look upon my own acceptance at its hands as a token that I must in some manner have betrayed the trust of genius!"

"Not so, for your vocation differs somewhat from his.

Both are for good; but by different means. An artist, however great his love of truth, need not offend as an author must. The artist's work is more immediately benign. It is his privilege only to *create*, while it is the author's duty often to *destroy*. You are a creator of beauty—Wakefield a destroyer of falsehood. Therefore, you will be loved and honored, while he will be persecuted or neglected."

"Ah, well! I dare not congratulate myself, or thank the Lord that I am so highly favored, while that fated destroyer, who would lift the pillars of the temple of Error only to bury himself under its fall, is left to suffer alone. Vivia, the soul may be very grand, but I have a pitiful feeling for the poor body that it inhabits. I do want to see Wakefield comfortable. I want to fill a sister's place near him. And I shall do so. I must go to see Wakefield, Vivia."

"Do not dare to do so! Wait, I conjure you! Wait, I command you! It is only my right."

The young author sat alone in his poor chamber. It was, as has been said, a third-story back room, with but one window, overlooking a confined prospect of old chimneys, dingy roofs, dilapidated dormer windows, murky walls rising above pent and squalid yards and reeking alleys, and all the abominations of the most wretched spot in the disheartening heart of the city.

Before this sole window, Wakefield sat writing. A dingy transparency, half drawn up, admitted a sort of smoky light. No vision of rising or of setting sun ever gladdened this scene. The old chair in which he sat, the old table at which he wrote, a discolored carpet, a ricketty cot bedstead, a rude bookshelf, the work of his own hands, and a very handsome traveling-trunk, a relic of past prosperity, comprised the whole furniture of this comfortless room. This chamber had not even the merit of quietness and seclusion. The adjoining front room was tenanted by a poor, laboring family; and the cries and squabbles of the confined and

fretted children, and the scoldings and complaints of the vexed and wearied mother, were almost as unceasing as they were intolerable. In the attic overhead was a cobbler all day hammering away at his lapstone, and a rag-carpet weaver ever clattering at his loom. The noise of this industrious pair above, together with the racket of the family in the next room, and of the lodgers in the lower stories, and the incessant passing up and down stairs of men in coarse pegged shoes over uncarpeted flooring, made of his place a purgatory to the quiet-loving author. Nor was his room free from intrusion. An importunate rap would bring him to his door, and a little black-haired girl would put in her head with the request—

"Mother says, please sir, will you chop her a little wood;" or, "Mother says, please, will you bring her a pail of water;" or, on some evening, "Father says, will you lend him a shilling 'till Saturday night;" or, upon some Sunday, "Mother says, please sir, don't be offended, but here's a bowl of nice soup she thought you might like."

So true is it, that go where we will, we cannot quite isolate ourselves from the sympathies, the requirements and the good offices, given and received, of our fellow-creatures.

At first, these interruptions were a great vexation to Wakefield, but at length he became rather interested in his poor neighbors, and the wood would be chopped, and the shilling lent, or the soup accepted with equal good-will. Finally, he grew so accustomed to the noise around him, that he ceased to hear it at all.

And now, if he sat before his writing-desk unable to concentrate his thoughts upon the subject in hand, it was not because a little Bedlam raved without, but because the thronging memories of the past crowded all else from his mind. He knew that *she* was in New York. He had not directly or indirectly sought her presence, yet he had seen her, and the beautiful fair brow and starry eyes seemed ever

bending over him. It had not needed that vision to revive her vision; that bright presence had never for an instant faded from that constant heart. He too believed in the eternal marriage of souls destined to each other; but it is a wasting of the vital energies in man to try to live only upon abstractions, however bright. There were times when for one warm clasp of Vivia's thrilling hand, he would have foregone a hundred years of that far-off eternal union. He sat now feeding upon the memories of the past, recalling his first vision of her on that bright spring morning, recollecting how, after that, he kept incessant watch for the little red mantle—how he looked for it in all possible and impossible places—how often in the autumn, when roving through the hills and glens, a burning bush, or an oak sapling in the distance, would become the ignis fatuus to lead him a long chase after the little red mantle, that, after all, when it came to him, would come *unexpectedly*. Then, the after years, when his heart awoke to the one grand passion of his life—when he hastened after fame and riches that he might purchase approach to something like equality with her—the agony of impatience he suffered then, lest his youth should pass, or she be married before he should gain those distinctions without which he dreaded to approach her. Then, when fame and the promise of fortune was his, for a while, and he laid them at her feet, the discovery of his tremendous mistake! Here he dropped his head upon his desk and groaned—the old agony had returned and bowed him down. She seemed infinitely removed from him. How long he remained bent beneath that passioned storm that surged over and over his soul cannot be computed by minutes, or hours, for the spirit knows neither time nor space. A voice sweeter than the music of the spheres roused him.

"Wakefield—"

Hark! Oh, for the love of heaven, let this be no illusion

of sudden madness! he dared not break the spell by moving; his very breath was suspended, his whole soul listened!

"Wakefield, look at me; I am your wife, if you will take me."

She had come to him as she had ever come, in the moment of his greatest need; she was standing at his side; she was speaking to him in the queenly purity of her soul.

"VIVIA! Vivia!" he exclaimed, and started up, opened his arms, and with one great heart-sob of joy, pressed her to his bosom—for a moment thus, and then relaxing his clasp, he sank down in his chair, ghastly pale, nearly swooning.

"Do you blame him, friend, for weakness?
'Twas his strength of passion slew him!"

Vivia's usually calm face was flushed and tearful—she stood leaning on the table, for an instant, until Wakefield, quickly recovering his presence of mind, started up and placed her in the only chair, and sank half kneeling by her side, saying—"There lady, there, and thus let us talk—oh, Vivia!"

Their "talk," alas! though it was the utterance of the truest, holiest hearts that ever throbbed in human bosoms, will scarcely bear repetition—it was like the conversation of all friends and lovers long revered and suddenly meeting, exclamatory, fragmentary, and almost as incoherent as their emotions were tumultuous. At last, when an hour of each other's society had somewhat calmed their souls, Wakefield said, "I do not ask you, dear Vivia, to what this blessed change in your purpose is to be attributed. You perceive that I only accept and rejoice in it."

"Well, though you do not inquire, I will explain; you are entitled to an explanation. It is not I who am changed, dear Wakefield, but yourself; my resolution waited only on your change."

"Yes, I am changed," answered Wakefield, glancing with

a sarcasm that was free from bitterness upon his threadbare coat, and thin, half transparent hands.

"Gloriously!" said Vivia, earnestly, "for now you serve not the time, not fame, nor popularity, nor any other form of selfishness, but the Lord, the truth, and humanity. I always knew that the day would come when fame and all the rewards she brings in her train, would weigh nothing in the balance with freedom of thought and speech, in the cause of good and truth. The day came sooner than I thought, blessed be the Lord! You have not hesitated to immolate all your earthly goods upon this holiest of altars."

"Pause, dear Vivia; I would not be ready to overrate my sacrifice. Tried by spiritual laws, it was no sacrifice at all. Dearest Vivia, the *suppression* of the truth that burned in my heart would have tortured me more than any persecution the world has power to inflict upon me for its *expression*. There was little merit, then, in choosing the lesser evil. When the test of moral heroism is applied to me, may I not be wanting!"

Vivia took the two thin hands he extended, and pressed them against her bosom, saying, rapidly and fervently—

"Whatever trial comes, you will not be wanting. But I wish to tell you, dear Wakefield, why, when I first returned to New York, and heard of the beautiful truth and integrity of your life, I did not come to you at once as I have come this morning. It was not that I waited for you to present yourself again to me. Well did I know that, after what passed at our last interview, you would not do so. I knew that I must come to you; but then a thousand womanly shynesses, unknown before, troubled me; spite of all reason and justice, my cheek burned, and my heart shrank before the step I was about to take. I, *even I*, was tempted to think that *even you* might misinterpret my act; that you might think my visit unmaidenly or presumptuous, or something else that it was not and could not be."

"That I—that I could have such disloyal thoughts of you, my queen, my lady! that I might have perished the day that such could have intruded upon me! No, no! No, no! No, Vivia, no! In my maddest days of resentment, no unworthy thought dared to enter my mind. But why should I deny it, when the very idea that such a denial is or ever could be necessary is altogether inadmissible."

"Ah! well—all these doubts and hesitations—unwonted guests in my bosom—were turned out at last by the simple integrity of my purpose, and I am by your side, dear Wakefield."

"God bless you and preserve you, my own Vivia!"

"But I must tell you about our little Theodora. She has a cottage and a studio. You know she had a picture on exhibition. She sold it advantageously, and wept over the proceeds of the sale because I would not allow her to come and divide it with her old playmate, as in times past *he* divided fruit or nuts, in their season, with her You have not a truer or tenderer-hearted friend in the world than my little Theodora."

"And Austin? Have they met—will she comfort him?"

"Austin has injured his better nature, and Theodora shrinks from him. Yet I hope that Austin's aberration is but temporary, and I mean that she shall save him. The sun has set, dear Wakefield. Will you take up your hat now and walk with me to Theodora's cottage, which is my present home, and spend the evening with us? How our reunion will delight her affectionate heart!"

"But—a little longer—we cannot talk in those horrible streets; give me a few moments more, while we arrange our future. How long, dear Vivia, how long?" he entreated, detaining her hand as she was about to tie her bonnet.

"I will change my name for yours just as soon as you please, or as some little preparations can be completed that shall not take many days. I have a preference to receive the wedding

benediction in the little gothic chapel of St. Genevieve, and at the hands of Father Francis, and in the company of our friends there. You would also desire the presence of your mother and sisters. Therefore, perhaps, I had better take my little Theodora and go down to Sunset Hills. You will follow just as soon as you please."

"Why may I not escort you down, dear Vivia?"

"You may do so, if you please; but now—" said Vivia, drawing her mantle around her, "it is time to escort me *home*."

The exquisite little cottage parlor was lighted up with that subdued, half light that artists love, and the fairy little tea-service was laid when Vivia reached the vine-shaded portico, and rang the bell. Theodora herself opened the door, and greeted her friend with the accustomed kiss; but when Vivia said,

"There is another with me," and Wakefield stepped forward, an exclamation of sincerest joy broke from the lips of Theodora, as she offered both her hands, and warmly clasped those of Wakefield, saying,

"Oh, Wakefield, I am so—*so* glad to see you, that I cannot even call you to account for not coming before—dear Wakefield!"

And after drawing him into the passage, she fluttered away, and in an instant laid another plate and napkin, that on entering he might find three already laid, and then she fluttered back again, in the same joyous, agitated way and conducted them to the parlor.

It was a very happy evening; during its progress the programme of their journey into the country was arranged. At a comparatively early hour, however, Wakefield thought proper to withdraw. Vivia attended him to the door.

"Our little Theodora is very lovely, but she is thin and pale," said Wakefield.

"Ah, yes! but that last is only since her return home.

Austin's dereliction has wounded her more deeply than even the fact of his marriage did. Then she thought that she had lost him only for this earth; now she thinks she is in danger of losing him here and hereafter. But she has never spoken of this, but I know it. You will assist me to bring Austin to his senses."

"If his affection for that lovely girl will not bring him right, nothing will, and I give him up."

"Nay, nay! Stretch out your hand—clasp him with a strong clasp—I would rather see a friend die than so fall!"

So they parted for the evening, Vivia returning to Theodora, and Wakefield to his poor chamber, to glorify it with the most beautiful and happy dreams that ever visited the heart of an accepted lover.

Theodora lay awake all that night, pondering. Those few years of farming and housekeeping had been of service to her, in giving a somewhat practical turn to a once too visionary mind. And the problem she laid awake to resolve was simply this—"Wakefield wants money; his wardrobe needs replenishing; he will wish to make some wedding preparations; how will he do it without funds? and how is he to get funds? that is the question! Vivia, in her sublime indifference to such things, will never think of this! will rebuke me if I bring it to her mind. She will, simply without a single reservation, or a moment's thought of what she does, confer her whole estate, as she confers herself, upon her husband, at the altar. So it must be my business. Now how shall I get my little deposit at the bank into the hands of Wakefield, without affronting or insulting him? that's the *finis* question!"

And the poor girl revolved this in her head, in the vain endeavor to solve it, or to sleep.

And early in the morning Theodora arose, pale and nervous, but eager and excited, hurriedly made her toilet, and put on her bonnet, and like a little conspirator as she was,

with herself alone, stealthily left the house, and walked until she met the earliest down omnibus, which she hailed and entered.

After a ride of two miles, she pulled the check-string, and got out in front of the establishment of a well-known publisher and bookseller. Mr. B———, the head of the firm, was acquainted with Theodora. She inquired for him, and was fortunate in finding him in his office. She requested a private interview, and immediately opened her business.

"You are acquainted with Mr. Wakefield Brunton, the author and lecturer?"

"Yes, madam, though we have lost sight of him in late years."

"Well, he lives at No. — Catherine street. I wish you would be so kind as to purchase the copyright of a volume of manuscript miscellanies that he has by him."

The publisher smiled at the apparent simplicity of his visitor, as he answered,

"Really, madam, we would be very happy to oblige you, but such books as that you propose are quite a drug in the market."

"Oh, yes, I know! you don't understand me. I wish you only to be *my* agent in purchasing the manuscripts from the author. I want them for myself. I wish to read them and to illustrate them with my pencil. You need not publish them; though perhaps in the future I may find a publisher for them."

While she spoke, Mr. B——— was looking at her eager, animated face with as much interest as politeness permitted.

"And how much are you prepared to offer?"

Without speaking, Theodora took a pen and wrote a check for five hundred dollars—it was the whole of her little deposit.

"I want you, if you will be so very obliging, as not to

give him *this* check; but as soon as the bank is open, get it cashed and take him the money for the manuscript."

"Ah! and you wish—"

"To remain *unsuspected* in this transaction—therefore my signature should not be seen on the check."

"But, my dear lady, this is probably ten times the worth of the papers."

"Now, I do not know that."

"Be assured of it, then; and if you wish to assist this young man—"

"I wish to possess the manuscript, sir, as I said. As for pecuniary assistance, Mr. Wakefield Brunton will soon be independent of that."

Delicacy forbade more questions or expostulations. Theodora, after making a few purchases as an excuse for her morning ride, returned home with a triumphant heart, resolved to work very hard to replenish her empty coffers.

In the course of that day, Wakefield received a visit from Mr. B———, and thanked Providence for a most unexpected windfall at the hour of his greatest necessity.

Their preparations for departure were soon made; and Vivia and Theodora, attended by the elderly lady who had matronized them in Europe, and escorted by Wakefield, departed for Maryland, and in due time arrived at Sunset Hills. I shall pass over the joy of meeting with their friends, and leave to the imagination of my young readers the details of the marriage that took place, as had been arranged, at the little gothic chapel of the Convent of St. Genevieve, in the presence of the pale but tranquil Abbess and her nuns, and of their own family party, Theodora and Austin acting as attendants, and Father Francis as the officiating priest.

There was but one little cloud over the marriage festival that followed. This was occasioned by the shy, reserved deportment of Theodora; she in every possible way, sought

to avoid Austin, who, with the tell-tale indices of excess upon his countenance, still visibly resented that avoidance. But as Austin left the neighborhood the morning after the marriage, the cloud soon vanished.

Vivia and Wakefield took Theodora back to her city cottage and studio, and then, unattended, they made a short bridal tour. After an absence of four weeks they returned again to New York, and sought out Theodora, intending to take her with them to spend Christmas at their home in the country. They found her at her cottage, but so pale and thin that they were seriously alarmed; and the next day Vivia went alone to see her.

"Oh! my little Moon, after seeing your sphere so full and rounded, must I behold you on the wane again? What is it now?"

No answer.

"Well! what have you been doing? any thing at your art?"

"No, nothing, nothing! I cannot paint! inspiration, life, purpose—all are gone—are gone!"

"But why—why?"

"Oh! Austin! Austin! if I had come home and found him dead, I could have borne it; nay, if I had found him married a second time, I could have borne it too! but to see him so fallen! so fallen! oh! wretched tongue of mine to speak that word of him! Vivia! you know that I have suffered, and have borne suffering with some fortitude—but this, oh! *this* has struck the very sensorium of my being, and my heart and frame seem breaking, Vivia—seems caving-in for the want of a supporting hope!"

"Take hope of me! Austin *shall* be redeemed! Believe it! believe it! Have faith! By faith you shall remove mountains, cure diseases, cast out devils, raise the dead. FAITH IS THE SECRET OF ALL POWER."

And Vivia pressing a kiss upon the brow of her friend,

left her to seek an interview with Austin, whose arrival at the Astor House she had seen by the morning's papers. She drove thither immediately, and requested to be shown into Mr. Malmaison's parlor. She found Austin in his dressing gown and slippers, and seated in an easy-chair by a table, before the fire, solacing himself with a cigar, a glass of brandy and water, and a political pamphlet. On hearing the lady announced, he started up, threw away his cigar, blushed for his brandy and water, and exhibited other such signs of confusion.

"Resume your chair, dear Austin," said Vivia, calmly seating herself, and adding—"I came this morning, to ask you to go with me, to-morrow, to see our little Theodora."

Austin folded his wrapper over his knees, leaned back in his chair, and answered mockingly.

"I cannot do so. She declines to receive me."

"As a *visitor*, yes! for she is living alone and must be very discreet; but as a *sitter*, and accompanied by me, she will have no scruple in receiving you. Come, Austin, I wish you to give Theodora a commission to paint your portrait for me—for I should like to possess *your portrait by her*, as the souvenir of you both."

"*Us both!* Well, dear Vivia, I perceive your kind intervention, and I accept it with thanks! Yes! I will try again. Though I have been repulsed by that lady, with sufficient emphasis, I will not despair. I suppose a man may submit with grace, to that which he knows he well deserves!"

"And especially when he knows that the merited rebuke pains her who administers far more deeply than him who receives it."

"You think it gives her pain to deny herself to me."

"It breaks her heart!"

Austin paused in deep thought, with his eyes fixed upon the ground.

"Dear Vivia," he said at last; "did you ever see a person with the impetus of a rapid descent upon him, unable to stop himself?"

"No! Nor are you one of these! You have the power to stop yourself when and where you will! but—shall I consider the appointment for to-morrow morning made?"

"Yes—yes, by all means!"

"Then get a carriage, and call for me at ten," said Vivia, rising to take leave.

The engagement was so well kept by both parties, that at half-past ten they were set down before Theodora's cottage. Theodora received Austin with that cold and reserved manner that she could not alter; but she bowed acceptance to the summons that was proffered her, and fixed the next day, at ten, for the first sitting.

The visitors then took leave.

"You see how she treats me," said Austin, in a voice of anguish, as soon as they found themselves alone in the carriage.

"And yet her true heart is breaking. You know why! You can change all that. And you will do it."

Austin made a secret resolution, that while sitting for his portrait, he would be temperate in all things.

Theodora was an excellent, but not a rapid painter. The portrait, she said, could not be completed under six sittings, and she preferred eight. Austin thought within himself that he was willing to give sixteen, or six hundred, if it would only secure her presence. Either Vivia, or Wakefield, or both accompanied Austin in each of his visits to the studio. And one thing was noticeable, that, whether it was from abstinence, or from the refining society and circumstances in which, day after day, he found himself, or from both these causes combined,—it is certain that Austin's countenance began gradually to lose those marks of excess that had so marred his grace, and to recover something of

the old clearness and intellectuality. Theodora's reserve, on the contrary, had continued unbroken. There were eight sittings, occupying, in all, a fortnight. At the close of the last, Theodora announced that the sittings were over; but that she should have to retain the portrait for a few days, to give such finishing touches as time and memory should suggest, before exhibiting the work to the eyes of her friends.

"Then we must govern our impatience for a few days longer," said Wakefield, rising.

Austin said he supposed so, and prepared to take leave.

"You two gentlemen may avail yourselves of the carriage. I shall remain with Theodora until the afternoon. I will meet you at dinner, dear Wakefield."

The "two gentlemen" bowed and retired, and Vivia was left alone with her friend.

"Has Austin yet seen his portrait, dear Theodora?"

"No; no one has seen it."

"I am glad of that. You know that one of the uses of art is—?"

"Redeeming! Yes, I know."

"Let me look at your portrait of Austin."

Theodora turned the canvas toward her friend.

"You have spiritualized this."

"Have I? I could not help it."

"I do believe you; you not only see your subjects spiritually, but you see them at their very best! You see only the divine side of their dual nature. And you are *very* right! To show a man what he ought to be, is to show him what he may be. Ah! what might not our Austin have been!"

Theodora turned the canvas once more toward the light and took up her brush. And while Vivia spoke of Austin and of the glorious promise of his youth, yet to be redeemed, the infinite possibilities yet before him, the young artist's heart began to glow and to communicate its fire to

her cheeks and eyes; her gaze grew upon the picture before her, and though she touched it but seldom, at each stroke the portrait responded with a higher life, as if her wondrous pencil possessed the power of psychologizing the dead canvas.

"It is done," she said at last, and sank half fainting in the arms of Vivia.

The next day Austin received notice that the portrait was finished and ready to be removed from the studio. He came, accompanied as usual by Vivia and Wakefield. When they entered the studio they found Theodora there, alone. The portrait still rested upon the easel, and the artist stood at its side with her arm thrown up over her work, and her head reclined as though in weariness or dejection. She looked up and bowed as they came forward, but seemed incapable of changing her position. They stood before the work in silence. It was at once a perfect likeness, such as would have been recognized by any one who had ever seen the original, and a highly spiritualized picture. A rush of strong feeling darkened the pale face of the erring man who stood before it, and in a deep and thrilling voice, heard only by one, he said, "*It is what I aspired to be!*" and hurried away to a distant window to govern or conceal his emotion.

When after a few moments he returned to the easel, he found that Vivia and Wakefield had withdrawn to the adjoining parlor. Theodora remained in the same attitude Her look of extreme paleness and powerless dejection, smote him again to the heart. Dropping on one knee at her side, he took her hand and said:—

"Theodora, my angel girl, have faith in me. I know, I know, that my faults have nearly broken your loving heart; but I am changed from this hour; put me on no longer probation, dear girl, but take me as I am; and I pledge myself in the sight of the Lord, never, never, to do any thing

to cause that gentle heart of yours a pain. Can you place that confidence in me ?"

For the answer, she turned with a deep smile beaming through her falling tears, and placed both hands in his.

Well! Theodora accompanied Vivia and Wakefield to their beautiful home at Sunset Hills, to spend with them the Christmas holidays. And early in the New Year there was another wedding at the little chapel of St. Genevieve. And now another Mrs. Malmaison lives at Mount Storm, and that is our little Theodora, who rules lady of the mansion where once she suffered, a poor, neglected little orphan. Her relatives, the Garnets, are never heard from. The head of that exemplary family is supposed to be speculating in California. Miss Nelly Parrot is still the permitted family goblin of Sunset Hills; but like every other "department" of that establishment, she is kept in tolerable order by the governing skill of old Mrs. Brunton. The Abbess Agatha, tranquil in her declining years, still presides at the Convent. And Father Francis continues to direct the neighboring Seminary. *They are waiting.* And Vivia is ever the medium of animating, sustaining, or redeeming life to all within her sphere. And when one asked the secret of her power, she answered holily—

"FAITH!"

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